

In Between by Piper Elizabeth

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Summary: What happened in the month between when Eleven closed the gate and the Snowball dance? This is my take on what that month was like. Definitely a Mike and Eleven story. Mileven

1. Chapter 1

Title: In Between

Rating: T – Just the usual stuff you'd see on Stranger Things

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Summary: What happened in the month between when Eleven closed the gate and the Snowball dance? This is my take on what that month was like. Definitely a Mike and Eleven story. Mileven

Spoilers: All episodes of Stranger Things

Chapter 1

"You did good, kid. You did so good," Hopper said as he held Eleven in his arms on the floor of the moveable platform at Hawkins Lab. Hopper could barely comprehend what he had witnessed. Despite all he had seen in the last year in Hawkins, Hopper still sometimes felt like he was living in a dream. Dream or not, all Hopper knew was that Eleven had done it. She had closed the gate. They were safe.

"Mike," Eleven whispered.

"Mike's ok," Hopper replied, his arms still around Eleven. He wanted to hold her and protect her and never let her go just like a father would.

"Home."

"Yeah, I'm going to take you home."

"No," she managed to say, her voice drowsy. Hopper finally released her so he could really see her face. She was pale and exhausted, blood still dripping from her nose and ears. She looked as if she could fall asleep at any moment.

"You need rest, kid."

"Mike. Home."

Eleven looked deep into Hopper's eyes, telling him exactly what she wanted with just her stare. Hopper knew how dangerous her "looks" could be. He had been the victim of more than just a few of her tantrums. He knew she was tired, but not tired enough to give in to him. She was going to stand her ground and get what she wanted.

"Ok," he mumbled. "I guess I owe you that."

Hopper helped Eleven to her feet, supporting her with an arm around her waist. He maneuvered the platform back to the safety of the real floor. He pulled Eleven with him as they stepped off the platform and through the control room, half carrying her. Cautiously, Hopper looked both ways down the hall before entering the dark pathway. Even though he knew Eleven had successfully closed the gate and that the danger was gone, Hopper wasn't about to leave anything to chance.

When he was sure the coast was clear, Hopper scooped Eleven up like she was a young toddler in his arms and began racing down the hall. He made his way back to where he had left Dr. Owens. The man was still on the ground, close to passing out completely.

"Hang in there, doc," Hopper said, ensuring that the belt he had tied around the man's leg to stop excessive bleeding was still secure. "I'm going to get you some help."

Hopper ran down the steps as fast as he could with Eleven still in his arms. He raced to his truck. Placing Eleven gently in the passenger seat, Hopper ran around to the other side and grabbed his radio.

"This is Chief Hopper," he said into the radio. "I need an ambulance to Hawkins lab."

"What's that chief?" Florence replied.

"An ambulance, Florence. I need an ambulance to Hawkins lab. Now!"

Hopper practically threw the radio back onto the seat of his truck, not waiting for Florence's reply. He looked over at Eleven. Her head

was slumped against the window, her eyes closed. Hopper threw his truck into reverse. He sped away, but slowed down several hundred yards down the road. He pulled the car to the side of the road where it would be hidden in the shadows and turned off the headlights.

"Mike," Eleven whispered. "Home."

"I know, kid. Soon."

"Soon," she repeated, hating the word. Soon never meant what it was supposed to mean.

"I promise," he said. She managed to glance at him with the eyes of an annoyed teenager. "I know, I'm not very good at keeping promises, but I'm going to do better. Before I can take you to Mike, I gotta make sure the doc's ok. But you have to stay here. Do you hear me? Stay here."

Eleven nodded, knowing how important it was that she do as he said. Besides, she was too tired to do much else. Hopper got out of the car and jogged back towards the lab. He looked back, making sure his truck was off the road enough. He ran inside the building, his gun still slung over his back. He made his way over to where he left the doctor. Hopper put his hands on the man's arms and began dragging him. Dr. Owens moaned, but was so out of it that he didn't say any coherent words.

"Sorry, Doc," Hopper said, knowing he was hurting the man.

He dragged him down the steps and into the main lobby. Just as Hopper got out the front doors with him, the ambulance arrived. It was two paramedics Hopper recognized. Adams and Stewart.

"What's going on, chief?" Adams asked. "There were no guards at the gate."

Stewart looked around as if he were staring at one of the seven wonders of the world. No one had been allowed inside the gates of Hawkins lab.

"There's been a break in and system malfunction. This is Dr. Owens. He's been hurt."

"What happened to him?" Stewart questioned.

Hopper looked down at the doctor on the ground at his feet. He hadn't had time to think about what he was going to say when the paramedics arrived. He couldn't exactly tell them the truth about the doc's injuries. Hopper just wanted the man to get live and then he wanted to get back to Eleven. Leaving her alone in his truck had him spooked.

"Just...do what you are trained to do," Hopper commanded. "Take care of him and keep him alive."

"Yes, sir," Adams said, saluting Hopper sloppily.

The paramedics began assessing Dr. Owen's condition. They wrapped his most serious injuries with bandages and then loaded him onto a backboard and into the ambulance.

"I'll check on him tomorrow at the hospital," Hopper said.

"Shouldn't you have backup, chief?" Stewart questioned. "If this place was broken into, there's no telling who..."

"Do your jobs," Hopper snapped. "And I'll do mine."

Without another word, the men got into the ambulance and drove off, the sirens blaring and the lights flashing. Once they were out of sight, Hopper ran back to his truck. Eleven was still in the front seat as he left her. Hopper breathed a sigh of relief.

"You ok, kid?" Hopper asked.

"Mike. Home."

"Yeah, I'll get you to Mike."

Hopper turned the key in the ignition and the car started. He threw it into drive and sped off down the road. As the turn to get to Joyce's house came up, Hopper turned on his blinker.

"No," Eleven said.

"This is the way to Joyce's house. You said you wanted to see Mike. He's at the Byer's house."

"No," Eleven repeated with more force. She sat up a little straighter.

Hopper stopped the car in the middle of the intersection, his blinker still on.

"Look, kid, I don't know what you've got going on in that head of yours, but..." Hopper began. He stopped when he saw a car speeding towards them. It screeched to a halt just a few feet from Hopper's truck.

"Mike," Eleven said, pointing to the car.

All of a sudden all of the car doors from the other car opened. Out spilled Mike, Dustin, Lucas, Max, and finally Steve from the driver's side. They stood in the beams of Hopper's headlights, staring at his jeep.

Hopper turned to Eleven. Even though he had seen her powers at work many times, it never failed to surprise him when she was able to do something. He didn't know how she knew the boys weren't at Joyce's, but somehow she did. And she was always right.

"What the hell are you all doing?" Hopper asked, scrambling out of the car.

"Eleven?" Mike questioned, his face showing all of his emotions. He looked terrified. "Is she ok? Where is she?"

"She's ok. She's in the truck."

Mike ran over to the passenger side of Hopper's vehicle before he even finished his sentence. Eleven was already opening the door. She practically fell into Mike's arms as she got out of the car. Mike caught her, helping her stay on her feet. She put her arms around his neck and hugged him tightly.

"Eleven? Are you ok?" Mike asked, returning her hug fiercely.

"Yes," she answered.

Mike took a step back to really look at her. He needed to see that she was alright for himself. Eleven smiled at him weakly as he looked her over.

"I was really worried," he admitted.

Mike took the sleeve of his shirt and wiped some of the blood still on Eleven's face from her nosebleed. He stared at her, wanting to know for sure that she was real and that was ok.

"You did it," Mike said. "You closed the gate."

"Yeah, she did. Now what the hell are you all doing out here?" Hopper asked again.

"We had to help," Dustin answered.

"Help? You were supposed to be staying at the Byer's house. And you..." he said, pointing at Steve. "You were supposed to be watching them!"

"They kidnapped me!" Steve protested.

"Kidnapped you?" Hopper questioned. "Unbelievable. Four kids kidnapped you. How the hell did that happen?"

"Don't blame Steve," Max said. "He helped."

"Helped what?" Hopper asked, trying to piece everything together.

"Well..." Lucas began.

"Never mind," Hopper interrupted, deciding that whatever story he was about to hear would only make him angry. "Forget it."

"We were just trying to help," Dustin continued. "And we did!"

"I said forget it. Look, right now you all just need to go home."

"Home?" Lucas said as if that were the craziest thing he ever heard. "After all this, you want us to go home?"

"Your parents must be worried sick," Hopper explained. "And we

don't need them poking around asking questions. It's best for everyone to go home and..."

"And what?" Max spoke up. "Pretend that none of this happened?"

"Exactly," Hopper replied. "And keep your mouths shut. You can't tell anyone what happened. Not even your parents."

"Like my parents would actually believe what happened today," Lucas said.

"We need to see Will," Dustin stated.

"Not tonight," Hopper responded.

"How do we even know if he's ok?" Mike asked, his arm still around Eleven.

"He's ok," Hopper assured them. "Joyce gave the signal. He's ok."

"You don't know that!" Lucas yelled.

"Yeah, maybe Mrs. Byers just said that so you would close the gate," Dustin added.

"Mrs. Byers wouldn't let El close the gate unless Will was ok," Lucas replied.

"How do you know? Were you there?" Dustin argued.

"Alright! Enough!" Hopper yelled. "Will is fine. I'm sure of it. Now I'm not going to ask you again. Everyone needs to just go home. Go home and keep your mouths shut. Do you understand?"

"We're not deaf," Max replied.

"Yeah, we hear you," Dustin said.

"I'll take them," Steve offered, finally speaking up.

"Sure they won't kidnap you again?" Hopper asked sarcastically. Steve rolled his eyes. "And what happened to your face?"

Steve touched his cheek with his fingertips. With all the adrenaline

pumping through his veins, he had almost forgotten that his face was practically beat to a pulp. Thinking of his injuries made him remember that it was all still very sore. He guessed he looked pretty terrible.

"That would be my fault," Max piped up. "Sort of."

"You let a little girl beat you up?" Hopper asked with a smirk.

"Enough!" Mike shouted. "We're not getting anywhere arguing with each other in the middle of the road. El needs to rest."

"Make sure they get home safely," Hopper said to Steve, ending the conversation. Mike was right. Hopper just needed to focus on Eleven.

Lucas, Dustin, Mike, and Eleven all locked eyes. After a moment, they all nodded. They didn't need words to communicate that they were all alright. Max watched them all, somewhat jealously. The boys and Eleven had a bond that she clearly was not a part of, but she so desperately wanted to be. Max tried to catch Eleven's eyes, but she noticed Eleven hadn't once looked at her. Max didn't know why, but she knew that Eleven did not like her. Trying to shrug off the feeling, Max climbed into the back of the car. Dustin and Lucas followed her.

"I'm staying with El," Mike announced.

"Fine," Hopper replied with a grumble.

"Mike. Home," Eleven said quietly.

"Yeah. We're going home," Mike assured her.

Eleven climbed back into Hopper's truck. Mike was right behind her. Hopper got into the driver's seat and they drove off. Eleven's head was resting on Mike's shoulder.

Author's Note: Thanks for reading! This is my first Stranger Things fanfiction. I hope you enjoyed it and if you did (or even if you didn't), please leave me a comment. I'm guessing this story will be about 8 or 9 chapters long. I started writing it because I really wanted more of the Mike and Eleven reunion (even though the Snowball dance at the end was amazing!). Anyway, let me know what you thought and I'll be posting the next chapter soon!

2. Chapter 2

Chapter 2

Hopper stopped his truck a few houses away from Mike's house. He didn't want Mike's parents to look out the window and see Mike climbing out of the sheriff's vehicle. That would bring too many questions. And questions were the last thing they needed.

"Alright, kid," Hopper said, turning to Mike. Eleven was fast asleep on his shoulder. "Here's your stop."

"She's coming with me," Mike replied.

"No. She's not."

"She's staying with me," Mike stated more forcefully. He was not going to take no for an answer.

"Listen, kid, it's been a long night. It's been a long week actually. Scratch that. It's been a long year. And in that year, my main goal has been to keep her safe. That hasn't changed just because the gate has closed. She could still be in danger. We need to get her somewhere safe for tonight."

"She's safe with me. She always has been."

"There's going to be government officials swarming all over this place soon. If any of them find out about her or figure out that she's here, you could be putting you and your family at risk."

"They won't find out," Mike said. "No one will find out."

Hopper sighed. The last thing he wanted to be doing was arguing with a pre-teen.

"What about your parents? What do you think they'll say when you walk in there with her?"

"I'll explain to my mom that Eleven is going to stay with us."

"Do you really think your mom is just going to take in some random

teenage girl because you say so? She is not going to roll out the welcome mat for a stranger. Plus she's going to have questions and we're not going to have any answers. Eleven can't stay here, kid. You know it and I know it. The difference is, you just don't want to admit it because you're angry with me. And I get it. You're mad that I didn't tell you she's been with me the whole time."

"I didn't even know if she was dead or alive," Mike whispered. "You could have at least told me that."

"I'm sorry. I did what was best for her and for you. You can be angry, but..."

"This isn't about you!" Mike yelled. "I mean, yeah, I'm pissed at you. But this is about her. This is about where she belongs. You're not taking her away from me again."

Hopper gritted his teeth. "I'm not taking her away from you. I promise."

"Something tells me your promises don't mean much," Mike retorted. "She ran away from you, didn't she?"

"I just want to keep her safe."

"I told you. I can keep her safe."

"You're a kid," Hopper stated.

"When Dustin, Lucas, and I first found her in the woods, I kept her from you, from my parents, from everyone! You didn't even know she existed because I hid her. I kept her safe."

Eleven's eyes fluttered open. She lifted her head off Mike's shoulder and looked at Hopper.

"Mike. Home," she said.

Hopper sighed. He could continue to argue with Mike about Eleven's safety and why it was better for her to stay with him, but it didn't matter. She wanted to stay with Mike. He owed her that after all of the promises he had broken.

"Fine," Hopper relented. "Tonight only. Tomorrow we can...figure things out."

"Fine," Mike agreed. "Wait here. In ten minutes, come around the back door. I'll be there." Mike opened the car door. Eleven reached for his hand. "I'll be right back. I promise." He squeezed her hand in reassurance before jumping out of the truck and running off towards his house.

When Mike got to the front door, he turned the knob and silently said 'thank you' in his mind. The door wasn't locked. Mike pushed it open and stepped in quietly. His father was asleep in his lazy boy recliner, his mouth open, drool drying on his cheek. Mike headed for the stairs to go up to his room. He would need some supplies if Eleven was going to stay with him. As Mike's foot touched the first step, the hallway light turned on. Mike's mom appeared at the top of the stairs. She was wearing her pink robe over her pajamas and her arms were folded. Mike had seen the look on her face many times before. She was angry.

"Where have you been?" She asked.

"At Will's," Mike answered quickly. It wasn't a complete lie. At one point, he had been at the Byers' house.

"Do you know what time it is?"

"I'm sorry, mom. We got...caught up playing our game."

"Where was Mrs. Byers?"

"She...she said it was ok."

"She did, did she?" Mrs. Wheeler asked with judgment in her voice about what kind of mother Joyce Byers was. "She didn't think to call us?"

"I'm sorry, mom. I told her you'd be ok with it. I wasn't thinking."

She shook her head. "You boys and that game."

"Sorry mom," Mike apologized again. He knew that the more he

apologized, the better off he'd be. His mom had always been a sucker for apologies.

"I'm just glad you're home safe."

Mike gave a fake yawn. "I'm really tired."

"Go to bed. We can talk more in the morning."

"Goodnight, mom."

"Goodnight, Mike."

Mike scampered off to his bedroom. He closed the door quietly behind him. He looked at his bed. It looked warm and inviting. Just seeing it made him tired, but he had much more important things to do. Mike grabbed a duffle bag and began filling it with the things he thought Eleven might need. He put in a pair of sweatpants and a sweatshirt, much like the ones he had given her the first day they met. He pulled open his desk drawer and grabbed his special stash of candy that not even the other boys knew about. He threw them in the bag, too. Mike quickly ran to the bathroom and cleaned up a little with a face cloth before changing out of his clothes and putting on his plaid pajama pants and grey shirt. He went back to his bedroom, grabbed a pillow from his bed, shoved it into the duffle, and slung the bag over his shoulder. Before he was about to leave, Mike glanced over at his bed.

"Crap," he said out loud.

Mike dropped the duffle bag and whipped the comforter off his bed. He went over to his closet and began grabbing any clothes he could get his hands on. He threw them on the bed and shaped them just right. He pulled the comforter over the lumps and fluffed them from the outside. Mike stepped back to look at what he had done. If his mom opened the door to look for him in the morning, she would hopefully be convinced that he was still sleeping with his head tucked under the covers. It's the best Mike could do. After all, he had no intention of leaving Eleven to sleep alone in the basement.

Mike picked up the duffle bag once more and opened his bedroom

door slowly. He looked both ways down the hall. His mom had obviously gone back to her room. Mike tiptoed out of his room. He went slowly down the stairs. His father was still sound asleep in his recliner. Mike opened the basement door, turned the light on, and went downstairs. He dropped the duffle bag and went to the back door. He flung it open. Hopper and Eleven were standing outside.

"Took you long enough," Hopper said, helping Eleven inside. He led her to the couch and she sat. Hopper looked around the basement. His eyes landed on the fort.

"We're fine now," Mike said, standing beside where Eleven sat on the couch.

Hopper looked at Eleven.

"You ok, kid?" He asked.

"Yes," she answered.

"Ok. I'll see you tomorrow then. Leave your radio on." He turned to Mike. "And don't try any...funny stuff." Mike glared at him. "Hey, I was a teenager once too. I know what you think about."

Mike looked down at Eleven on the couch. Did he like her? Yes. Was he attracted to her? Yes. Would he ever act inappropriate with her considering the state she was in? Never. Besides, despite the feelings Mike sometimes felt creeping up on him at unexpected times (that his dad had awkwardly explained to him were normal signs of puberty), Mike still felt mostly like a kid. And he was fine to stay that way for a little while longer. His only goal was to make sure that Eleven was safe and taken care of. There was nothing else on his mind. Well, almost nothing.

"We'll be fine," Mike replied. "She'll be fine."

Hopper nodded. He looked at Eleven who gave him a weak smile.

"Be good, kid," he said.

Hopper left the basement the same way he had come in, shutting the door behind him. When he was gone, Mike looked at Eleven.

"Thanks," she said.
"For what?" Mike asked.

"For being my friend."

"I'd do anything for you, El. You know that. Right?"

Eleven nodded. She took his hand and squeezed it. With his cheeks getting hot, Mike let go of her hand and grabbed the duffle bag he had brought downstairs. He pulled out the extra set of sheets.

"We can put them on the couch. Make up a nice bed for you."

Eleven eyed the fort made of blankets that Mike had constructed for her when she had first mysteriously arrived. She pointed at it.

"You want to sleep there?" He asked. She nodded. "Ok. I brought down some clean clothes for you. You know, if you want to change."

Mike took out the extra pair of sweatpants and T-shirt. He handed them out to Eleven. Mike half expected her to reach for the bottom of the shirt she was wearing and start taking it off like she had that first night she had stayed with him. But she was no longer that naive girl. She had learned a lot, including the meaning of privacy.

Eleven took the clothes. She stood up slowly and made her way into the bathroom. Mike noticed she left the door open just a little. Clearly she still didn't like being in small places without some easy means of escape and Mike knew why. The next thing Mike heard was the shower turning on. Mike hoped his mom wouldn't hear the water through the pipes, wondering what was going on.

Mike crawled into the fort. He wanted to sit there one last time, to remember what it had been like night after night sitting and waiting for her. He had always hoped that she was still alive and that he would reunite with her someday. But in the back of his mind, he wondered if she was gone. Gone forever. He worried constantly that he would never see her again. Her absence had changed him. His parents probably thought he was just going through a rebellious teenage phase, but being a teenager had nothing to do with it. He missed El.

As he waited for her to finish her shower, Mike leaned his head back against a pillow and suddenly felt very tired. It was as if all the sleepless nights from the entire year had caught up with him and he was exhausted. At such a young age, he felt like he had lived a thousand lifetimes. Mike closed his eyes. Before he knew it, he had fallen asleep.

Not knowing how much time had passed, Mike awoke to the feeling of something or someone touching him. His eyes snapped open. He was lying on his side, staring straight into Eleven's eyes. She was lying down in the fort beside him, their noses practically touching. The fort was too small to allow much room.

"Eleven, what are you doing?"

"Sleeping," she replied.

Mike could see that Eleven's head was resting on the same pillow he was using. He could smell his own shampoo and soap that she had used. Eleven was in his oversized sweatshirt and sweatpants. Although still wet, her hair was beginning to curl. Gone was the grungy look that she had appeared in. Mike felt like he had his Eleven back.

"I can sleep on the couch," he said although he didn't really want to move. He liked having her that close.

"No. Safe. I feel safe here."

Mike nodded. He knew what she meant. He felt safe there too for the first time in a long time. Hopper's words echoed in Mike's head. 'Don't try any funny stuff.' Would sleeping so close together count as funny stuff? Mike ignored the man's voice and allowed himself to just be happy in the fact that Eleven was where she belonged. They both fell asleep, neither of them saying another word.

Author's Note: Thank you so much for all of the great comments from the last chapter. I hope you liked this one too! Thanks for reading!

3. Chapter 3

Chapter 3

The next morning, Mike awoke slowly. His eyes fluttered open. He was on his back and could see a variety of blankets above him. Confused, it took Mike a few seconds to remember that he wasn't in his bed. He was in his fort in the basement with...

"Eleven?" Mike called, sitting up.

He nearly smashed his head into hers. She was sitting cross legged beside him, her hair a mess of brown curls. She was staring at him. Mike nearly cried out at the shock of her being so close, but he managed to hold it in. The last thing he wanted to do was to let out a girly scream. Mike got himself into a sitting position so that he was facing Eleven. The fort was so small, their knees were touching.

"Eleven, what are you doing?" He asked, running his hand through his own disheveled hair.

Eleven reached out a finger towards his face. Before she could touch the edge of his mouth, Mike brought his hand up and wiped away the drool that had dried onto his skin. He felt embarrassed.

"You make noises when you sleep," Eleven stated.

"What?"

"Not as loud as Hopper. But noises like Hopper."

"You mean snoring?"

"Yes, snoring," she said.

"I don't..." he began, ready to say that he hadn't been snoring. But he didn't finish, deciding not to argue. "Were you watching me sleep?"

Eleven nodded. "Yes."

He was surprised by the fact that she hadn't tried to deny it. Then

again, Eleven was almost incapable of lying. Mike was the one who had taught her that friends don't lie and she had taken that to heart. He knew he could always trust what she said.

"You shouldn't watch someone sleep. It's...weird."

"Why is it weird?"

"I don't know," he answered. "It just...is. Sleeping is like...it's like changing in the bathroom. You need your privacy."

"But we slept together."

Mike coughed. He knew Eleven didn't mean it the way it sounded. And the truth was, they had slept next to each other all night.

"Don't go around saying that."

"Why?" He asked innocently.

"Just...don't. Ok?"

"Ok."

"Did you sleep alright?" He finally asked after a pause.

"Yes," she answer simply.

"Good. Feeling better?"

"I'm hungry."

"I'll get you something to eat."

"Eggo's?" She questioned.

Mike nearly laughed. "Yeah, we should have some in the freezer. Stay here."

Mike climbed out of the fort and headed for the stairs. As he reached the top, he took a moment to listen. He could hear his little sister Holly humming to herself. That meant his mom was up, but at least it didn't appear as if she noticed that he wasn't in his room. Mike

opened the door slowly, ready to come up with some excuse as to why he was in the basement and not in his room if he ran into his mom. Mike could hear the sound of the hair dryer from the bathroom on the main floor. It was his perfect opportunity to sneak upstairs and make it look like he had been in his room all night. Mike dashed from the basement steps, being sure to close the door quietly. He bounded up the carpeted steps to the second floor and ran into his room. He quickly disassembled the 'clothes person' under his covers, changed into a fresh pair of Jeans and a striped T-Shirt, and then left his room. His mom might yell at him for leaving his room so messy, but that was a whole lot better than her finding out that he had spent the night in the basement with a girl.

Mike casually exited his room and made his way down the stairs slowly. His mom was standing in the kitchen over the stove.

"Morning, mom," Mike said casually.

"Good morning, sweetheart," his mom replied. "I'm just making eggs. Why don't you take a seat and I'll..."

"Actually, I was thinking I might just have some waffles."

"Sorry, hon, but I'm not taking out the waffle maker today."

"That's ok," Mike said. "Eggos are fine."

"Eggo's?" She questioned as if offended as to why anyone would want a frozen waffle over her home cooked eggs.

"Yeah, is...that ok?"

His mom sighed. "I guess."

Mike went to the freezer and pulled out a new, unopened box of Eggo's. He grabbed four and put them in the toaster oven. Mike tapped his foot nervously, waiting for them to be done. His mom was busy at the stove and thankfully didn't notice his twitch. As soon as the Eggo's popped out of the toaster, Mike grabbed them and put them on a plate. He headed for the stairs to go down to the basement.

"And where are you going?" His mom asked.

"Ahh...Dustin and I are in the middle of a game over the radio," he lied quickly.

"It's 7:30 in the morning," his mom said. "Didn't you just get up?"

"Yeah," he replied quickly, trying to think of a way to cover up his mistake. His mom thought he had been sleeping all night in his room. "It was the game we were playing last night. We planned to call each other at 7:30 to keep playing."

"Dustin is up at 7:30 on a day you have off from school?" His mom asked, surprised.

Mike had to think hard about what day it was. The days of the week seemed to blur together. It was Monday, wasn't it? Why wasn't his mom yelling at him to get ready for school? Then Mike remembered. They had the day off from school because all of the teachers were going for something called 'professional development.' Whatever it was, Mike was just glad to have another day off. He wanted to be able to spend it with Eleven.

"Yeah...he's up," Mike responded.

"You boys play that game way too much."

Mike ignored his mother. With the plate of Eggo's in hand, Mike went down to the basement, closing the door behind him. Eleven was right where he left her - in the tent. He climbed in and sat across from her, setting the plate down between them. Eleven picked up an Eggo and took a large bite.

"You know there is other food out there besides Eggo's," Mike told her, taking a bite of his own waffle.

"I know. TV dinners."

"TV dinners are barely food."

"Hopper says I have to eat all of my dinner before Eggo's."

"So you've been living with Hopper all this time?" Mike questioned, ready to get some answers.

Eleven nodded. "Are you mad?"

"Mad? No. I'm just...confused."

"Confused?"

"Why didn't you come to me?" Mike asked. "Why didn't you come home?"

"Too dangerous."

"That's what Hopper told me, but you could have come home, El. I would have protected you. I would have..." Mike stopped when he saw Eleven shaking her head. "Tell me. Tell me what happened to you."

Eleven sighed. "I got out. Out of the upside down," she explained.

"After you killed the demigorgon at the school?"

"Yes. I got out and I went to your house, but there were flashing lights and people. So many people. Asking questions and trying to find me. I couldn't...I couldn't come home."

Eleven finished her Eggo. Just remembering how hopeless she felt in that moment when she had stood outside Mike's house, worrying that just her mere presence was putting him in danger. She never wanted to put him in danger.

"I'm sorry," Mike said quietly.

"Me too."

"Is that when you went to Hopper's?"

"No," she answered. "I went into the woods. I stayed there for a long time."

"By yourself?"

She nodded. "Yes."

"But...it was winter. It would have been freezing out there. What did

you do? What did you eat?"

"I hunted for food. I had your shirt. And I...I took a hat from a man. I know it was wrong, but I was cold."

Mike felt panicked. Imagining her living out in the woods all alone horrified him. Of all the scenarios in his head of where Eleven might have been, this was not one of them. Knowing she was so close and that he sat back and did nothing, made him angry at himself.

"Eleven, it's not safe out there. You can't just...live out in the woods."

"Hopper found me," she continued. "I trusted him. I had to. He brought me to a house in the woods. There were rules. He told me I couldn't leave. He told me I couldn't find you. That it was too dangerous."

"But you watched me?"

"Sometimes," Eleven admitted. "Sometimes I missed you so much I had to see you. I'm sorry I couldn't tell you."

Mike looked down at the empty plate between them. Through their conversation, they had eaten all of the waffles.

"Are you still hungry?" Mike asked.

"Yes."

Mike scrambled out of the tent to get his duffle bag that he had brought down the night before. He dragged it over them and took out the candy he had shoved inside. Settling back into the tent, he let Eleven pick her candy first. She grabbed a Hershey's bar. Mike took out a Three Musketeers. It wasn't his favorite candy, but it was in honor of Dart.

"Who is Max?" Eleven asked after she had taken a big bite of the chocolate bar.

"What?"

"Who is Max?" She repeated.

"She's just a girl," Mike answered. "She moved here this year."

"A friend?"

"I guess. I don't know."

"Do you like her?"

"No," Mike responded quickly. "I mean...she's ok."

"Would you ask her to the Snowball?"

"What? No. Of course not. Besides, I think Lucas and Dustin like her."

"Two people can like the same person?"

"Yeah, I guess," Mike answered, finishing his candy bar.

"Does she like them?"

"I don't know. You'd have to ask her."

"I saw you," Eleven said. "With her."

"Saw us? Where? In your mind?"

"No. I left the house in the woods. I went to school. I saw you in the big room where you play sports."

"The gym? You saw us in the gym?"

"Gym," Eleven repeated, letting the word settle on her tongue.

"You pulled Max off her skateboard, didn't you?" Mike accused although there was no anger in his voice. The memory of that day floated back to him.

Eleven looked down almost ashamed and nodded. "Yes."

"I knew it! I knew you were there. I can't explain it, but I knew. I even went looking for you, but you were gone." He stopped to think for a minute. "Wait. Why did you make her fall?"

"Because she was talking to you."

Suddenly a lightbulb went off in Mike's head. He knew why Eleven had pulled Mike off her skateboard. The same reason Mike would have done it if he had seen Eleven talking to some strange guy.

"Oooh," Mike said.

"Why are you smiling?" Eleven asked. "Did I say something funny?"

Mike knew this was one of those moments where he had to explain things to Eleven. As confusing as his own emotions could be as an up and coming teenager, he knew that there were even more emotions that Eleven didn't even have words for.

"No. It's just...it sounds like maybe you were...jealous."

"Jealous?"

"Yeah. It's like when someone else has something you want. Or when you want to be with somebody, but then seen them out with someone else. That's jealous."

"I was jealous," Eleven repeated.

"But it doesn't matter because nothing is going on with me and Max. I didn't even want her hanging out with us in the first place. Ok?"

"Ok."

Mike decided it was time to change the subject. "So...where have you been these last few days? Hopper didn't seem to know either."

"I found my mother. And my sister."

"Wait...what?"

For the next twenty minutes, Eleven told Mike everything about her mother, her aunt, and finding her sister. She explained how she almost killed Ray Carol, the man who had hurt her and her sister. She told him what her mother had been through and how Eleven had ended up at Hawkins lab when she was a baby. When she was

through, Mike was stunned, but happy and relieved that she had decided to come back. Not only had she saved all of them from most likely getting killed, but he also just missed her and needed to see her.

"So, should I start calling you Jane now?" Mike asked when Eleven was through.

Eleven thought about it for a moment. That was the name her mother had given her. It was the name she had been born with. Not just the one that was branded on her arm. But that name meant nothing to her. It wasn't who she was.

"No," she answered. "I am Eleven."

"Good because you'll always be Eleven to me."

Eleven smiled. Mike looked into her eyes, feeling this need to be close to her. He felt so many mixed emotions about wanting to keep her safe, but also wanting to kiss her again all while trying to hold onto his childhood innocence. Then again, after everything Mike and the others had gone through, their childhood innocence had all but been stripped from them. When Mike met Eleven's eyes, he was surprised at how close she was to him. Just a few more inches and he could press his lips against hers. Mike blocked out everything around him and began to lean towards her. In that moment, though, there was a quiet knock on the door.

"Hopper," Mike said, annoyed. The man had the worst timing. That was the second time he had interrupted what could have been Mike's second kiss. Mike scrambled out of the makeshift tent and went to the backdoor. Hopper walked in.

"You just open the door for anybody?" Hopper asked.

"I could close it again and let you stand out there," Mike replied sarcastically.

Hopper ignored him and walked into the basement. His eyes landed on Eleven, who was still sitting cross-legged in the tent in Mike's sweatshirt and sweatpants. Hopper eyed the pillow and the blankets.

He also saw the empty plate with two candy wrappers on top.

"Did you have candy for breakfast?" Hopper asked.

"And waffles," Eleven answered.

"And did you sleep on the floor?" Hopper questioned.

"With Mike," Eleven added before Mike had the chance to answer.

"What?" Hopper roared, turning his attention to Mike.

"Keep it down. My mom is right upstairs."

"What the hell does she mean?" Hopper questioned sternly.

"We both slept in the tent," Mike explained. "No big deal."

"No big deal? What did I tell you? I told you..."

"Nothing happened," Mike interjected. "We slept. That's all."

"Is that true, Eleven? Did you just sleep?"

"Yes," Eleven answered truthfully, unsure of what all the fuss was about. Sure, she had seen characters on TV do more than just sleep when they were in the same bed together. Sometimes they kissed and sometimes they would be under the covers and it looked like they were wrestling, but Eleven didn't quite know what it all meant. She did not want to wrestle Mike. She just wanted to be safe.

"Well, you had your little sleepover. Now she's coming home with me," Hopper stated.

"What about Will?" Mike asked. "How's Will?"

"I talked to Joyce this morning," Hopper answer. "He's ok. Still wiped out from all of this, but he knows who he is and he remembers everything. He should be ok."

"I want to see him," Eleven said.

"No. That's not a good idea. We need to get you home and

somewhere safe."

Eleven shook her head. "I want to see him."

"Look, kid, this isn't up for discussion," Hopper stated more sternly.
"You had your fun. Now it's time to go home."

"No!" Eleven shouted.

Mike glanced at the stairs, hoping his mom hadn't heard that.

"Just let her see Will," Mike interjected. "I want to see him too."

"This place is already crawling with government officials. If anyone finds out about Eleven..."

"They won't," Mike said. "We won't go anywhere near the lab. It's just Will's house."

"Please," Eleven added in a soft voice.

Hopper shook his head. "I don't like this."

"It'll only be for a short time," Mike insisted. "It'll be ok."

"Fine. But then she is coming home with me. End of discussion."

"Ok," Mike agreed.

"Ok," Eleven repeated.

Author's Note: So this was one of my favorite chapters to write because I love writing dialogue and of course I love any scene where Mike and Eleven are together. It bugged the heck out of me that they were separated for the whole second season (although the reunion made it totally worth it). Anyway, I hope you liked it and stay tuned for the next chapter!

4. Chapter 4

Chapter 4

After yelling up the stairs to his mom that he was going over to Dustin's, and not giving his mom time to respond, Mike left out the back door of the basement with Hopper and Eleven.

"Where's your car?" Mike asked Hopper once they made it to the street.

"Borrowed that one from the impound lot," Hopper explained, pointing to a car parked in front of the house next door. They all began walking towards it. "Figured it would be a little less conspicuous than driving everywhere in the sheriff's truck. I told Florence I'd be coming in late today."

"You know, you could leave El with me and we could go see Will without you," Mike suggested. "Then you wouldn't have to be late for work."

"Not a chance, kid. Get in the car."

Mike and Eleven both climbed into the backseat of the burgundy sedan. The inside smelled like stale cigarettes. Hopper got into the driver's seat. He eyed Mike and Eleven in the rearview mirror, noticing they were sitting awfully close together. He opened his mouth to say something when Eleven caught his eye in the mirror. The look she was giving him said he better not say anything. Sighing, Hopper started the engine and drove away.

"Glad to see you're back to your usual self," Hopper said to Eleven, referring to not just her ability to stare at him, but also the fact that she looked like herself again. He was happy that she had washed off the dark eye makeup and had rid her hair of the gel that had been holding it back. Her hair was naturally curly and she looked younger without the makeup on.

"I liked my look," she responded. Mike glanced over at her. He was not a fan of the goth look. Eleven smirked and Mike knew she was

just teasing Hopper. She was acting like a typical teenager.

"Yeah, well, we'll talk about the makeup and the hair and everything later," Hopper mumbled.

They drove in silence towards Will's house. It took only a few minutes to get there. When they arrived, Eleven and Mike jumped out of the car before Hopper had even put it in park. They went sprinting towards the house. Mike knocked on the door.

"Can we see him?" Mike blurted out the second the door had opened. Joyce was standing in the doorway in her bathrobe.

"Sorry," Hopper said, approaching the house. "They wouldn't take no for an answer."

"That's ok," Joyce replied. Her voice was happier than it had been in days. She looked like she had finally gotten some sleep and her face wasn't so pale. "Will's in his room with Jonathan. He'll be happy to see you."

Mike and Eleven pushed past her. Mike led the way to Will's room, passing by the hundreds of papers Will had drawn that they had turned into a map of Hawkins. The door to Will's room was open. Will and Jonathan were sitting on the bed, a boom box between them. They were listening to some song Mike had never heard before.

"Hey!" Mike said, walking into the room. Eleven hung back, standing in the doorway. "How are you feeling?"

Mike looked his friend over. The last time he had seen Will, he hadn't looked like himself. Of course, that was because he had a monster basically living inside of him. Mike felt reassured seeing Will looking like his old self again.

"Good," Will answered. "Still tired and a little weak, but I feel good."

"You do know who I am, right?" Mike asked somewhat jokingly.

"Yeah, you're my stupid best friend who once threw up in the middle of the brand new rug in first grade," Will said with a smile.

"Mrs. Perkins was so mad!" Mike added with a laugh. It was good to have Will back again.

"I'll give you guys some privacy," Jonathan said, turning the boom box off. He placed it on Will's desk before leaving the room.

Will turned to look at Eleven, who was still lingering by the door. She felt awkward just walking in. After all, she and Will had never actually met face to face when he was conscious. But she felt like she knew Will just as much as the other boys. Her ability to communicate with him when he was in the upside down made her feel a strong connection to him. Somehow she knew that he could feel it too.

"Will, this is Eleven," Mike introduced.

"I know," he responded before turning to look at Eleven. "Thank you."

"For what?"

"For saving me."

Eleven shook her head. "I didn't save you."

"You closed the gate."

"I opened the gate. If it wasn't for me..."

Will got off the bed and stood up. He walked over to Eleven and gave her a hug.

"You saved me," he assured her.

Mike watched his two friends. A part of him thought he might be jealous that Will was hugging her. But he felt no jealousy. He knew Will and Eleven would always have a special bond.

"I'm sure Dustin and Lucas are dying to see you, too," Mike said, sitting down on the edge of the bed. Will sat beside him and Eleven took a seat on the other side of him.

"Tell them I'm ok," Will replied. "But I think right now I'm a little too tired for too many visitors. Maybe tomorrow."

Mike nodded, signaling his promise to relay the message. They all sat in silence.

"What was it like?" Mike finally asked.

Will shook his head. "I don't remember much. It's like I've been... asleep for these past few days. I have some memories, but it's more like...flashes in my head. Nothing really makes sense."

Eleven looked around Will's room. Her eyes landed on a framed picture on Will's desk. It was a photograph of Dustin, Lucas, and Will all dressed up with the word 'Snowball' in glittery letters behind them. She was surprised that Mike wasn't in the picture.

"It doesn't matter," Eleven piped up, focusing back on the boys. "It's over now. The gate is closed and it won't ever be opened again."

"I'm ready to put this all behind me," Will said. He yawned.

"We should go," Mike said. "Let you get some sleep. I'll come back with the guys tomorrow."

"Ok," Will replied.

Mike and Eleven made their way out of the room. They headed down the hall towards the kitchen, but stopped when they heard Joyce and Hopper talking. The two adults were sitting around the kitchen table, sipping coffee. They were deep in low conversation. As much as Mike was interested in what they were saying, he also just wanted to spend as much time with Eleven as possible before she had to go back to the cabin in the woods.

"Come on," Mike said, tugging on Eleven's hand. He led her back down the hallway the way they came and out the back door and into the backyard. The Byer's dog was running around. He trotted over to Mike, dropping a ball at his feet. Mike picked up the ball and threw it and the dog chased after it.

"I'm glad Will's ok," Eleven said.

"Yeah, me too."

They started to walk aimlessly around the backyard. Mike knew that Hopper would probably tell them that they shouldn't be outside where anyone could see them, but Byers home was pretty secluded and Mike wasn't worried. If they heard a car or anyone approaching, they'd hide.

"Mike?" Eleven asked, stopping in her tracks. The dog greeted them once more, this time sitting at Eleven's feet. She began to pet his head.

"Yeah?"

"Did you...did you go to the Snowball?"

Mike stopped walking and looked at her. "Last year? No."

"Why not?" Eleven asked.

Mike shrugged. "Lucas, Dustin, and Will went, but I..."

"You...what?"

"I didn't want to go without you," he admitted. "It didn't feel right."

"I'm sorry I couldn't be there."

"Me too." Mike paused and picked up a stick off the ground. He threw it and the dog went chasing after it. "I broke my promise."

"What do you mean?"

"I promised you that we could go to the Snowball and that you could live with us and that my mom would get you a bed and..."

"It's ok," Eleven assured him.

"No it's not. Friends don't break promises."

"You didn't mean to break it."

Mike sighed. He still felt terrible about everything that had happened to Eleven in the last year.

"There's another one," Mike finally said.

"Another what?"

"Snowball. It's the last one. Well, for me. For the eighth graders, I mean. They don't have Snowball dances in high school."

"No?"

"No. They have things like homecoming."

"Homecoming?" Eleven questioned, the word coming out of her mouth slowly. It was a new word. One she didn't quite understand.
"Aren't you already home?"

"Yeah...it's not about coming home. Well, I guess it is, but it's...it's hard to explain."

"Oh."

"Would you want to go with me?" Mike asked hesitantly.

"To the Homecoming?"

"No, not homecoming. Well, not homecoming this year. Maybe next year, but...what I mean is...do you want to come with me to the Snowball this year?"

Eleven smiled. "Yes."

"Ok, good," he replied with a smile of his own. They continued walking. Mike finally stopped to lean on a large tree trunk. Eleven stopped in front of him, the dog running over to her with the stick. He dropped it and Eleven threw it for him again.

"I have to ask Hopper," Eleven said.

Mike sighed, but he knew Eleven was right. Just like Mike had to ask his parents for permission to do things, Eleven would have to ask Hopper. Mike just hoped they'd get the answer they wanted. He had been wanting to go to the Snowball dance with Eleven for almost a year. He had missed out last time. He did not want to miss out again.

"Do you like living with Hopper?" Mike asked.

Eleven shrugged. "He's nice to me. He keeps me safe."
"I could keep you safe."

"What about your mom? Your family?" Eleven questioned.

Mike knew she was right. He couldn't just tell his mom that Eleven would be staying with them. She would never accept that. And he couldn't keep Eleven a secret forever if she were living in Mike's basement. Eventually his mom would find out and things would go from bad to worse.

"Don't you get...lonely living out there with him?"

Eleven nodded. "Yes. I watch a lot of TV by myself. But now that you know I'm back, maybe you could watch TV with me sometimes."

"I'd like that."

"Maybe Dustin and Lucas could come too," Eleven suggested. "And Will when he's better."

"Yeah. We can all hang out."

"Hang out?"

"It's what friends do. They hang out and watch a movie or play a game or just talk about school or whatever."

"I think I'd like to hang out."

"Me too."

"Mike?" Eleven asked, stepping closer to him.

"Yeah?"

"What do you do at the Snowball?"

"Well, you hang out with your friends and your...date."

"Date?"

"Yeah. Your date," Mike answered. He moved closer to her. If he reached out, he could touch her. "The person you go to the Snowball with is called your date."

"So I'd be your date?"

"Yeah."

"What else do you do at the Snowball?" Eleven asked, taking yet another step. Their toes were practically touching as they stood facing each other.

"Well, usually there are snacks and things, but mostly you...you dance with your date."

"Dance?"

"Yeah. They play music and you dance. Sometimes fast and sometimes...slow."

"Slow?"

Mike was staring into her eyes. If he just moved his face forward a few inches, he would be able to kiss her again.

"Eleven!" Hopper yelled, practically running out of the house. Mike rolled his eyes. This was the second time that day that Hopper interrupted Mike's second kiss. Mike backed up from Eleven, not wanting to give Hopper any more fuel to dislike him.

"We're here," Eleven replied, stepping out from behind the tree.

"What are you doing out here?" Hopper exclaimed. "Anyone could see you! Get inside now."

"We're perfectly fine," Mike answered.

"I didn't ask you, kid."

"Come on," Hopper said to Eleven. "It's time to go home."

Hopper began to walk off from the backyard to the front yard where

the car was parked. He opened the passenger side door and Eleven climbed into the car. Hopper closed the car door and began walking around the car to the driver's side. Clearly, Mike wasn't invited to get into the car too.

"I want to come with you," Mike said.

"Absolutely not."

"You're not going to hide her from me again. I want to know where you're keeping her."

"I'm not keeping her," Hopper retorted. "I'm giving her a home. And I already told you, I'm not going to keep her from you."

"I want to see where she's been living."

"I know you do, but you gotta trust me, kid. Can you do that?"

"Fine," Mike finally relented.

"Joyce will take you home. I'll be in touch, kid."

Mike stared at Eleven through the car window. She put her hand up to the glass. Mike pressed his hand against the window, mimicking her. The car started. Mike stepped back as Hopper put the car in reverse and drove away.

Author's Note: Happy New Year everyone! Thanks for reading. Don't forget to write a review. I really appreciate every comment. It helps me become a better writer and motivates me to keep working!

5. Chapter 5

Chapter 5

"Why don't you like Mike?" Eleven asked as Hopper drove them away from the Byers' house and towards the cabin in the woods.

"I never said I don't like Mike."

"You're not nice to him."

"I'm not nice to anyone, kid, in case you haven't noticed."

"You're nice to Joyce," Eleven stated. Hopper did not reply. Eleven stared at him, but he kept his eyes on the road.

"I like Mike, ok?" Hopper eventually said.

"Ok."

"He's a good kid, but he can't keep you safe like I can. Sometimes I think he forgets he's a twelve year old kid."

"He's thirteen," Eleven corrected. "Same as me."

"Even worse."

"Why is that worse?" Eleven asked.

"Because now he's a teenager."

"I'm a teenager."

"Yeah, but he's a teenage boy," Hopper pointed out.

"So?"

"Teenage boys have only one thing on their mind."

"I don't understand."

Hopper glanced over at Eleven. "Forget it," he said. "You have your whole life to figure it out and be disappointed in men."

"I want to go to the Snowball," Eleven stated.

"What the hell's the Snowball?"

"A dance."

"A dance?"

"At school."

"You don't go to school," Hopper reminded her. "And what do you know about school dances anyway?"

"I know you dance and eat snacks. And hang out with your date." Hopper raised his eyebrow. "Is that what Mike told you?"

Eleven nodded. "Yes. He asked me to the dance. I said yes."

"Oh you did, huh?"

"I want to go to the Snowball," Eleven repeated.

"We'll see."

"What does that mean? We'll see?"

"It means I have to think about it."

"Why do you have to think about it?"

"Because I'm in charge of keeping you safe. And that's what I'm going to do. It's still not safe for you to be out in the open, kid."

"But..."

"I said I'd think about it. Ok?"

"Ok."

A few miles down the road, Hopper stopped the car. He parked it in a secluded area, pulling it behind a thick set of trees so that it would be difficult to see unless you were actually looking for it. Eleven hopped out of the car and began making her way through the woods. She had

only made the trek once, when Hopper had first brought her to the cabin. After all, she had never really been allowed out. But Eleven still remembered the journey. She led the way through the woods with Hopper close behind her. When she saw the cabin, Eleven was surprised that she felt happy. After being stuck inside for months on end, Eleven had come to think of the cabin as a prison of sorts, not much different from the cell she had been kept in at Hawkins Lab. But as she approached the building, Eleven started to realize that she had missed it. With Hopper, the cabin had become a home.

"You ok?" Hopper asked as Eleven stood outside the cabin, staring at it.

"Yes," Eleven replied.

Hopper unlocked the door and Eleven stepped inside. She looked around. The house still had boarded up windows after she and Hopper had fought and the windows had burst. It was darker than usual inside without the sunlight streaming in.

"I need to go to work," Hopper said as Eleven looked around the house. Everything looked the same and different all at the same time. "You have to stay here."

"Ok."

"I'm serious, kid, you can't leave. If possible, things are more dangerous than before. There will be people here investigating what happened at the lab and if they find out about you or..."

"Ok," she repeated. And she meant it. She would not leave the cabin. At least not that day anyway.

"I'll be back after work."

"Ok."

Hopper pulled her in for a tight hug. He held her close.

"I missed you, kid."

"I missed you too."

Finally letting her go, Hopper turned around and left the cabin. Eleven stood in the middle of the room, looking around. The place was a mess. Eleven decided that it wasn't going to be a mess by the time Hopper came home.

Four Days Later

Mike stared at the clock on the wall in his math class. The seconds seemed to be ticking by even slower than usual. They had exactly one minute and thirty-six seconds left until the bell rang to signal the end of the day. Mike couldn't wait. He was supposed to be working on the math problems on page one-twenty-seven from his text book, but Mike hadn't even completed one problem. Math was the last thing on his mind. It was Friday and Mike was determined to see Eleven. Hopper had been putting his off all week. On Tuesday, Mike had ridden his bike to the police station, but Hopper had been too busy to see him. On Wednesday, Mike tried to reach Eleven on the radio, but no one responded. Mike guessed that was because Hopper was too paranoid to use the radios. On Thursday, Mike called the police station incessantly, but Florence eventually stopped answering after telling Mike at least a dozen times that Hopper was unavailable. After four days without seeing Eleven, Mike wasn't going to take no for an answer.

Finally the bell rang. Mike slammed his book closed and gathered his things in his arms. He was the first one out of the room, heading for his locker.

"Mike! Wait up!" Lucas called, running after him.

"Yeah, slow down," Dustin added.

Mike didn't stop until he reached his locker. He quickly put in the combination and opened the metal door. Grabbing his backpack and the few things he would need for the weekend, Mike slung the bag over his shoulders.

"Want to tell us what's going on?" Lucas asked.

"Gotta go," Mike replied.

He began darting through the halls. Lucas and Dustin were right behind him. When Mike burst through the front doors and down the walkway, Dustin put a hand on his shoulder.

"Where's the fire?" He asked, somewhat out of breath.

"I have to talk to Hopper," Mike finally answered. He went over to the bike rack and began working on the combination for his bike lock.

"Why? Is something wrong?" Lucas asked.

"I need to see El."

"Let us come with you," Dustin said.

"Hey guys!" Max called out, skateboarding over to the boys. "What's going on?"

"Mike's going to see Eleven," Dustin announced.

Mike shoved him. "Shut up."

"What? Max knows who she is," Dustin said.

"You don't need to announce it to the whole world," Mike snapped in a low voice.

"What's wrong with you?" Lucas asked.

"Yeah, you've been on edge for days, man," Dustin added.

"He misses El," Max stated as if it were the most obvious thing in the world.

Mike sighed. "Hopper said I'd be able to see her, but I haven't even talked to her since Monday."

"So what are we going to do about it?" Lucas asked.

"We?" Mike questioned.

"Yeah. She's our friend, too," Dustin replied.

"I'm going over to the police station and I'm not leaving until Hopper talks to me," Mike decided.

"We're going to the police station," Lucas corrected.

"Look, guys..." Mike began.

"I don't think Hopper's going to want to ignore all four of us," Lucas explained.

"Four?" Mike questioned.

"Yeah, Max can come too. You want to see Eleven too, don't you?"

Max looked at Mike. He gave her a look. She clearly wasn't invited.

"Ah...I...I can't," she lied. "I have to go home. Besides, you guys should catch up with her."

"We're wasting time," Mike said. "Let's go."

Mike successfully got his bike unlocked from the bike rack and pulled it out. Dustin began working on his bike.

"You sure you don't want to come?" Lucas asked Max.

"I'm sure. Besides, I told my mom I'd come home after school. You guys have fun."

"See you this weekend?" Lucas questioned hopefully.

"Meet you at the arcade tomorrow?" She responded.

Lucas smiled. "Yeah."

"I'm free Saturday," Dustin piped up.

"Dude," Lucas said, trying to give Dustin the hint that he wanted to hang out with Max by himself. Then again, Lucas also knew that Dustin had a crush on Max too. Things were getting very complicated very fast.

"We can all go to the arcade tomorrow," Max suggested.

"Maybe Will will want to come too now that his mom has finally taken him off bedrest," Dustin added.

"Can we go now?" Mike asked impatiently.

Mike hopped onto his bike, ready to go.

"See ya," Lucas said to Max as he got his bike unlocked from the bike rack. The three boys sped off, leaving Max standing beside her skateboard.

The bike ride to the police station only took a few minutes since Mike was leading the pack and was pedaling furiously. His backpack bumped against his back as he rode. When they reached their destination, the boys dumped their bikes outside, not bothering to lock them. Who would steal three bikes from the front of the police station? Mike raced inside. Florence looked up from her desk when she heard them bursting in.

"What in tarnation is all the commotion about?" She asked.

"I want to see Hopper," Mike stated, leaving no room for argument.

"He's busy."

Mike wasn't going to listen and just walk away. He marched past Florence and straight back to Hopper's office. Dustin and Lucas followed him. Florence shouted after them, but they didn't stop. Mike burst through Hopper's office door. He expected to see Hopper sitting with a donut in one hand and a coffee in another with his feet propped up on his desk, but that wasn't the case. Hopper was standing, speaking to a man in a very nice black suit.

"What the hell?" Hopper said at the interruption.

"We need to talk," Mike said, ignoring the other man in the room.

"You have to wait outside," Hopper stated.

"Not until you talk to me."

"I can't talk right now," Hopper said sternly. "Wait outside."

"But..."

Dustin grabbed the back of Mike's jacket and began pulling him out of the room. He could tell that Hopper wasn't playing around. Once the boys were in the hallway, Hopper walked over to his office door. He stared at Mike for a few seconds, trying to convey a message with his eyes. Whatever the message was, Mike didn't understand. Hopper slammed the door, leaving Mike, Dustin, and Lucas alone in the hall.

"I told you he was busy!" Florence called from her desk.

"What do we do now?" Mike asked, his voice low so that no one could overhear.

"We wait," Dustin answered.

"I don't want to wait."

"You think that guy was from the government?" Lucas asked. "Or from Hawkins lab?"

"Yeah, maybe he's asking about El," Dustin whispered.

"I mean, do we even know if that doctor Will was seeing is still alive?" Lucas wondered. "Maybe that guy in Hopper's office is investigating his death."

"Or Bob's," Dustin added.

"I just want to see El," Mike said.

With that, Hopper's office door opened. The man in the suit shook Hopper's hand. He glared at the boys before walking down the hall and out of the police station. Mike, Lucas, and Dustin scrambled into Hopper's office before he had a chance to invite them. Hopper closed the door behind them.

"You can't just come barging in here and..." Hopper began, his hands on his hips.

"We wouldn't have to come barging in here if you would have talked to me on Tuesday. Or answered my calls on Thursday or..." Mike

retorted.

"I've been busy," Hopper stated.

"Yeah, who was that?" Dustin asked.

"You don't need to know everything, kid," Hopper answered.

"I want to see Eleven," Mike said.

"I know."

"Then why haven't you let me see her?"

"I'm trying to figure things out."

"Figure things out?" Mike repeated. "What the hell is there to figure out? She's my friend. I want to see her. Let me know where she is and I'll..."

"I've been working out a deal," Hopper explained.

"Deal? What kind of deal?" Mike questioned skeptically.

"Doctor Owens has been in touch with some people from the government to close the case on Hawkins Lab for good. They're going to shut it down and not investigate it. Or Eleven."

"That's good, isn't it?" Lucas asked.

"If we can make the deal. That man who just left is important to this whole thing. He says the government will keep quiet if everyone involved, including you guys, will also keep quiet."

"Then they'll leave Eleven alone?" Mike asked hopefully.

"That's the deal. They'll leave her and all of us alone. No questions. No more problems. I've been working on this non-stop, kid, for days. That's why I haven't had time to return your call."

Mike sighed. The anger he felt was leaving his body. Hopper wasn't purposefully ignoring him. He was just trying to keep everyone safe.

"How is she?" Mike asked. "Is Eleven ok?"

"She's fine," Hopper assured him. He paused. "She's been asking about you."

"She has?" Mike replied.

"Look, I have to go to the hospital to check in on Dr. Owens. I know I'm going to regret this, but, why don't I...take you to see El."

"Really?" Mike asked, surprised.

"If I do that, you can't tell anyone where she is," Hopper continued. "I'm trusting you guys."

"But you said there's a deal..." Lucas said.

"Yeah, but we're still working out the details. We still have to all lay low for a while. Besides, people will start talking if they think I've got a random teenage girl in a cabin out in the woods somewhere, you know what I mean?" The boys nodded. "So we have a deal?"

"Deal," Mike said, reaching out his hand. Hopper looked at him before shaking his hand.

"Alright. You won't have a lot of time, but let's go."

Hopper grabbed his hat and jacket from a coat rack by the door. He led the way out of his office with the boys following behind.

"Thanks," Mike said.

"You know, despite what you may think, kid, I'm glad you and Eleven are friends."

"You are?"

"Yeah, she needs someone watching her back."

"Thanks," Mike said because he didn't know what else to say.

"But don't get me wrong. You're a teenage boy. She's a teenage girl. I know how this ends. So sometimes I'm not going to like you very

much. You got it?"

Mike nodded. "Got it."

Mike could live with not being liked as long as he got to see Eleven.

Author's Note: It's a snow day today so I've had plenty of time to write! I'm glad I got this posted before we potentially lose power. Thanks to everyone who is reading and don't forget to comment!

6. Chapter 6

Chapter 6

Mike sat in the front seat of Hopper's jeep. He couldn't stop his leg from shaking. He was nervous and he didn't know why. After all, he was going to see Eleven. He shouldn't be nervous. She was a friend – just like Lucas or Dustin or Will. Then again, Mike would never invite them to the Snowball as his date. Ok, so maybe she wasn't just like his other friends. Maybe that's why he was so nervous.

Dustin and Lucas were in the backseat of the vehicle. All of their bikes were thrown into the hatchback. Hopper pulled off the main road and onto a dirt road that led into the woods. A few minutes later, he stopped the truck completely and turned off the engine.

"We have to go in on foot," Hopper told them. "And you can't tell anyone where this cabin is. If you do..."

"We get it," Mike interrupted. "I think we've proven that we're pretty trustworthy."

"Yeah, we'll see," Hopper mumbled.

They all got out of the car and Hopper led them through the woods. There was no path, no easy way to figure out where they were going. Every tree and shrub looked the same. Mike had no clue how Hopper wasn't hopelessly lost. But eventually a small cabin came into view. Mike picked up the pace. Hopper led them up the steps of the porch and to the front door. He knocked a specific pattern of knocks. A moment later, the door opened. Eleven looked at Hopper and opened her mouth to speak, but then she saw Mike, Lucas, and Dustin standing with him. Her eyes grew wide and she smiled.

"Hey," Mike said with a grin.

"You brought them?" Eleven questioned, surprised.

"Yeah well, the kid wouldn't leave me alone," Hopper answered.

"Thank you," Eleven said practically bouncing from excitement.

Mike wanted to hug her, but he refrained. He didn't want things to be awkward. Instead, he looked her up and down. Eleven was wearing a pair of blue jeans and a dark green sweater. She had slippers on her feet and her hair was its natural, curly self. In other words, she looked perfect. They all entered the cabin, Hopper closing the door behind them.

"So, this is where you've been staying?" Dustin asked, looking around the interior of the cabin.

"Yes," Eleven answered.

"It belonged to my grandfather," Hopper explained. "At one time, my family owned a lot of the land around here before selling it off. I don't think anyone would even remember that this place was here. It seemed like a good place to hide."

"I can't believe you were this close all this time," Mike said.

"What do you do for fun?" Lucas wondered. Although Eleven had done a good job with cleaning up the cabin, it was still pretty bare. Aside from the TV, it didn't look like there was much in the form of entertainment.

Eleven shrugged.

"You seriously have been living here for almost a year with just Hopper?" Dustin asked, his voice low.

"What's so wrong with that?" Hopper jumped in.

"Nothing," Dustin replied immediately. "Nothing at all. You're great. Better than great. You're like a cool grownup. You know, not just a grownup who thinks he's cool. It's just...you must work a lot and..."

"It's lonely," Eleven interrupted.

"Well, it won't be anymore," Mike said. "Now that we can visit."

Hopper opened his mouth to say something about how 'visits' might not be as frequent as Mike was implying, but he decided to hold his tongue. Hopper could see how happy Eleven was with her friends at

the cabin. He didn't want to ruin that. Besides, having visitors was just another thing they'd have to figure out.

"Where do you sleep?" Dustin asked. He was just as intrigued by Eleven and her living arrangements as he was when they had first found Eleven in the woods and brought her to Mike's house. It felt like there were so many unanswered questions.

"A bed," Eleven answered.

"Do you have a room?" Lucas wondered.

"Stop grilling her," Mike insisted.

"Do you do crazy mind tricks in there?" Dustin continued.

Eleven looked at him strangely. "No."

Hopper stood back and watched the friends interact. It brought him back to when he was a teenager and one minute he'd be arguing with his friends and the next minute they'd be laughing and slapping each other on the back. That's how friends worked as young teenagers. Although he would most likely never admit it out loud to them, Hopper was glad that Eleven had found a group of friends that were trust-worthy and had her best interest in mind. Of course, he maybe would have preferred if she had more female friends, but they could work on that.

"Can we see it?" Lucas asked.

"See what?" Eleven replied.

"Your room," Dustin clarified.

Eleven shrugged. "Ok."

"I have to go run an errand," Hopper announced.

"You're leaving?" Eleven asked.

"You have company and I'll be back soon," Hopper explained. "Ok?" Eleven nodded. "Ok."

"Promise me you won't leave," he stated.

"Promise," Eleven assured him.

"I'm trusting you guys to keep her safe," he said to the boys.

"Don't worry about us," Dustin replied with a toothy grin.

"Yeah, we got El's back," Lucas added.

"Let's hope so," Hopper said, heading for the door. "Oh and don't forget. No funny stuff!"

As soon as Hopper left the cabin, locking the door behind him, Mike, Lucas, and Dustin followed Eleven into her room.

"What is funny stuff?" Eleven asked when they entered the small room. "Does Hopper not want us to have fun?"

"No, he just doesn't want you and Mike making out," Lucas said with a laugh.

"Making out?" Eleven questioned. She looked to Mike for clarification.

"Forget it," Mike said quickly. "Lucas is just being stupid. Hopper just wants us to be...safe."

"Yeah, I don't think that's what Hopper meant," Dustin added.

"Shut up," Mike snapped.

The boys looked around the space. There was a cot in one corner and a small desk in another corner. Other than that, there wasn't much else in the room. It certainly didn't look like a teenage girl's room at all.

"Where's all your...stuff?" Dustin wondered.

"Stuff?" Eleven replied.

"Yeah like books or posters or anything?" Lucas continued.

"I don't have...stuff," Eleven said.

"Well, don't worry," Mike told her. "We can share some stuff so you'll have something to do when you're here."

"Share?"

"Yeah," Mike responded. "It's when you let someone use something for a while. It's what friends do."

"Friends," Eleven said with a smile.

"So are you going to the Snowball Dance with Mike?" Dustin asked.

"Dustin!" Mike yelled, embarrassed. He had told the boys that he had asked Eleven to the dance, to which they teased him incessantly. He had also told them most of what Eleven had told him. How she had escaped the Upside Down and how Hopper had found her in the woods and taken her to the cabin for safety. He even told them about how she had gone off to find her mother and then sister. He didn't, however, tell them about how Eleven had pulled Max off her skateboard because Eleven had been jealous. That was something Mike wanted to keep to himself.

"Hopper says 'we'll see,'" she said.

Mike flopped down on her bed. The cot wasn't very comfortable.

"That's when grownups say when the answer is no," Mike mumbled.

Eleven sat beside him on the bed. "No?"

"I knew it. I knew he wouldn't let you go."

"He didn't say no," Eleven reminded him. "He said 'we'll see.'"

"He mine as well have said no," Mike continued. "You know he thinks it's too dangerous." He sighed. "It's fine. I won't go either. We can stay here and...watch a movie or something instead."

"What?" Lucas jumped in. "No. You have to go."

"Why?" Mike asked.

"Because you didn't go last year," Dustin said.

"You said last year was kind of lame," Mike reminded them.

"Yeah, but this is our last Snowball. Our last big thing in middle school," Lucas explained.

"Do you really want to be telling your grandchildren someday that you missed your last Snowball?" Dustin asked.

Mike gave him a look. "I'm pretty sure by the time I have grandchildren...if I have grandchildren...I'm not going to care about the eighth grade Snowball."

"You have to go, man," Lucas continued.

"You have to go," Eleven repeated. "Even if I can't."

"We can talk about this later," Mike said. He really had no interest in going to the dance without Eleven, but he also did want to go to hang out with his friends. Mike could only hope that Hopper would come around and let Eleven go.

"So...if you don't go to school, how do you learn?" Dustin asked.

"Word of the day," she replied as if that explained everything.

Lucas and Dustin exchanged a look.

"What's the word of the day?" Lucas questioned.

"Amend," Eleven answered.

"What?" Dustin replied, confused.

"The word today is amend. It means to make corrections," Eleven explained.

"I know what it means," Dustin responded. "That's how you learn? A word of the day?"

Eleven shrugged. "How do you learn?"

"We go to school," Lucas answered.

"Leave her alone, guys," Mike said.

"What was your sister Eight like?" Dustin questioned. "Did she have powers like you? Was she scary?"

"Is she the one who put all of that dark makeup on you and gelled your hair back?" Lucas asked.

"I said, leave her alone," Mike stated, standing up to prove he meant business. He knew the guys were curious about Eleven. They had been since she had mysteriously come into their lives. But Mike didn't want to badger her. He wanted everyone to treat her like a normal kid. If even her own friends couldn't do that, who would?

"Got any games?" Lucas asked after a pause.

"Chess," Eleven answered.

Lucas gave Dustin a knowing look. "Tournament time?" Lucas questioned with a raised eyebrow.

"Tournament time," Dustin replied.

"What's tournament time?" Eleven asked.

Mike rolled his eyes. "You're about to find out."

As soon as Hopper had finished his walk through the woods and got to where he had parked his car tucked into the side of the road, he wondered if leaving Mike, Lucas, and Dustin at the cabin with Eleven was such a good idea. He did trust the boys...to an extent. He also knew, however, how persuasive they could be. What if they convinced Eleven to go out with them somewhere? Had Hopper been firm enough about not leaving the cabin? And what if one of them blabbed to somebody about the cabin's location? Hopper nearly turned off the engine to go back inside before stopping himself. Eleven had left him because he had been too controlling and wouldn't let her be a normal teenager. If Hopper started that again, he could

lose her for good. Sighing, Hopper put the car in drive and drove off.

It only took him about twenty minutes to reach his destination. The hospital came into view. Hopper parked in the visitor section and walked through the front doors. The young, petite nurse at the front desk smiled at him with perfectly white teeth.

"Hello sheriff," she said. "To what do we owe the pleasure?"

"Just here to see a patient," he answered, smiling back. Hopper knew how to be a charmer when he wanted to be.

"And who might that be?" She asked, ready to write it down on the visitor's log on the desk.

"Well, now, that's official police business," he said, leaning his elbow on the corner of the desk.

"Oh...a secret?" She flirted.

"Yup."

"I won't tell anyone," she whispered.

"I'm sure you wouldn't," he said. "But a cop's got to have his secrets. You have a good day, Julie."

Hopper slipped right past her without her writing down who he was going to visit. She just stood at the desk, staring at him as he walked by. Hopper made his way down the hallway. He knew that someone could easily see him go into the room he was visiting, but he didn't want it documented on a visitor's log. Hopper rode the elevator to the third floor and found room 303. He was able to get into the room without anyone noticing. He closed the door behind him after he entered.

"Just the man I've been waiting to see," the patient said from the hospital bed.

Hopper walked over to the man's bedside. Dr. Owens was sitting up in bed, the TV on in front of him. Some old black and white movie was playing. Dr. Owens grabbed the remote and turned the TV off.

"How are you feeling, doc?" Hopper asked.

"I'll live," Dr. Owens answered. "Thanks to you."

"I was hoping you'd say that."

"What do you mean?"

"I need a favor."

"What kind of favor?"

"This is off the record," Hopper explained. "And if you ever repeat what I'm about to tell you I'll deny it."

"Understood."

"Let's hypothetically say that I have someone in my care that the government might be very interested in getting back."

"I heard you were working out a deal to keep you and this hypothetical someone safe," Dr. Owens replied.

"True. But I need more than that. I don't want to just keep her safe."

"You want her to be normal. She's never going to be normal. I can't help you with that."

"I don't want her to be normal. I just want her to live a normal life."

"I don't know how I can help you with that. You're her guardian. I would say that's up to you."

"But you see, I'm not her guardian," Hopper explained. "Not legally. Legally she doesn't even exist."

"Ah...I see."

"Can you help me?"

"I can't do much from this hospital bed. But I'm getting released soon. I'll see what I can do."

"Thank you." Hopper turned to walk away. "By the way, how did you explain your injuries to the doctors here?"
"A bear."

"You said a bear attacked you? In the Hawkins lab?"

"I told them we were keeping a bear for experiments. He got out and attacked."

"And nobody has asked the sheriff's department to go out and look for this make believe bear?"

"I told them the government took care of it," Dr. Owens said. "I can be very persuasive when I need to be."

"Must be a job requirement to work for the government."

Dr. Owens shrugged. "It doesn't hurt."

"Feel better, doc," Hopper said before walking out of the room. He didn't know if he was doing the right thing involving Dr. Owens, but the man was Hopper's only hope to give Eleven the life she deserved.

Author's Note: Thanks for reading! If you liked it, don't forget to comment!

7. Chapter 7

Chapter 7

Three Weeks Later

"El? Are you there?" Mike spoke into the new two-way radio that Hopper had given him. Hopper had said it was more secure than the radio Mike had to communicate with his friends. This radio had a longer range and only connected to its pair at Hopper's cabin. Apparently the signal was un-hackable. Hopper was still leery about Eleven and Mike communicating using radios, but they had pestered him into saying 'yes.' After all, he had made good progress with the men in the government. Eleven should be safe.

Sitting in his tent in the basement, Mike waited for a response from Eleven on the radio. All he heard was static. Mike looked at the clock on the wall. It was seven o'clock on the dot. That was the time they had arranged to talk every day. And so far, they had stuck to the plan.

When Hopper had returned from his errand on the day he had first let Mike, Dustin, and Lucas visit Eleven at the cabin, Mike insisted that they come up with some kind of plan for Mike to continue seeing Eleven. After much debate and Hopper saying 'no' to almost everything Mike suggested, they finally agreed on visitation once a week. At least to start off with. Mike would press Hopper for more days once Hopper got used to the idea that Eleven was finally safe. They all agreed on Tuesday afternoons.

So for three Tuesdays in a row, Mike had counted down the seconds until the last school bell rang and he could hop on his bike and pedal off to the cabin in the woods. The first time he went, Dustin and Lucas were with him again. They got lost once in the woods, but eventually found the place. They spent the afternoon teaching Eleven about dungeons and dragons and recounting some of their best quests. She didn't seem very interested, but she never said that out loud. Mike knew she just wanted to fit in even if that meant pretending she liked something that she didn't actually care much about. Although he enjoyed spending time with his friends, Mike

almost wished that Lucas and Dustin hadn't joined him. He hadn't been alone with Eleven since they had slept beside each other the night they had been reunited. He desperately wanted to be alone with her again.

The second Tuesday Mike visited, Will had accompanied him. Mike was almost a little jealous at how well Eleven and Will got along. Mike knew it was because they both shared a common experience – the Upside Down. He knew that talking to Eleven was making Will feel better. Although physically he had recovered and was fine, Mike knew that mentally, Will still had a long way to go. And talking to Eleven helped.

Mike had only visited her once alone just a few days ago. Even Hopper wasn't home. He was stuck at work dealing with some kids who had spray painted the side of the high school. After Mike had arrived at the cabin, he and Eleven sat awkwardly on the couch together for a short while. It was strange how one minute he felt like he could talk to her forever and the next minute his palms got sweaty just being so close to her. Eventually they started talking about some TV show that Eleven liked to watch and their conversation blossomed from there. Eleven told him a little more about what her time was like at Hawkins lab before she met Mike and Mike told her about his childhood and his family. Eleven liked to hear about his family the most. And it was then that Mike realized how lucky he was to have the childhood he had. After only a few hours, though, Mike had to go home. He knew his mom would want him home for dinner. Mike had almost kissed her as she walked with him to the door of the cabin, but he hadn't. The timing just didn't seem to be quite right. Eleven waved goodbye to him as he hopped on his bike and left. That was what Mike was remembering as he sat in the tent in his basement, the radio held up to his mouth, waiting for Eleven to respond.

"Mike?" Eleven's voice finally came through the radio loud and clear.

"Yeah, I'm here," he said in return, smiling.

"Sorry. Hopper wouldn't let me go until I ate all of my vegetables."

"Carrots and corn again?" Mike asked.

"Yes."

"You have to tell him to cook you something other than frozen TV dinners."

"What did your mom cook today?"

"Meatloaf," Mike answered. It was one of Eleven's nightly questions. She always wanted to know what Mike had for dinner. He guessed it was because her diet consisted of the same things. Eggo waffles and anything that Swanson's made frozen on a little plastic tray.

"I don't like meatloaf," Eleven replied.

"I think you'd like my mom's. It's a lot different than that frozen stuff." Mike decided to change the topic. "What was your word today?"

"Egregious."

"What does that mean?"

"Something really bad," she told him.

"You gotta tell Hopper to pick some better words."

Eleven laughed. Mike loved the sound of her laughter. He didn't get to hear it enough. He imagined what she was doing in the cabin. Was she sitting on her bed? Was she on the couch where Hopper could hear? What was she wearing? Overalls with a plaid shirt? The green sweater that looked good on her? Really good.

"He doesn't like when I tell him what to do," Eleven said with a lightness to her voice. Mike imagined her smiling.

"Maybe next time I can bring you a dictionary so you can find some better words," Mike suggested.

"I'd like that."

Mike smiled himself. There was a natural pause in their conversation.

"The Snowball is on Saturday," Mike finally said, hoping Hopper wasn't in the room with her.

"I know."

"Has Hopper...changed his mind?"

There was a pause.

"No," Eleven finally answered.

When Eleven told Mike that Hopper officially said 'no' to her going to the Snowball Dance, Mike was angry. He wanted to yell at Hopper, to give him a piece of his mind. But Mike didn't. He didn't because he knew that Hopper was just trying to keep Eleven safe. Maybe sometimes he went overboard, but Mike would never forgive himself if something happened to her. He had lost her once. He never wanted to lose her again.

"Oh," Mike replied.

"Are you still going?" Eleven asked.

"I...I don't know," Mike answered.

"You should go, Mike."

"There doesn't seem to be any point...without you."

"Lucas and Dustin and Will want you to go."

"It's just a lame dance."

"But you'll be with your friends. I'd want to be with my friends if I could."

And that's when Mike realized all of the things that he could do that Eleven couldn't. It wasn't just going to school or being able to leave his house. It was being with his friends pretty much whenever he wanted. It was doing normal kid things. And that included going to a stupid, middle school dance. Mike didn't want to go without Eleven, but somehow he felt the need to go for Eleven.

"Ok," he said. "I'll go."

"Good."

"But I won't have fun without you."

"Will you tell me about it after?"

Mike was about to respond when he heard his mom call his name from upstairs.

"Coming!" Mike yelled to his mother without pressing the button on the radio for Eleven to hear.

"Mike?" Eleven said into the radio.

Mike clicked the button so she could hear him again.

"Yeah," he answered. "I'll tell you all about how lame it is. But I gotta go. My mom's calling."

"Goodbye Mike," Eleven said.

"Bye El."

Mike put the radio down, covering it with blankets so that his mom wouldn't see it when she came down to do the laundry. Even though he liked talking to Eleven, sometimes after their conversations, Mike felt sad. Like he wished there were more he could for El. Mike heard his name being called again. He scrambled out of the tent, trying to put the Snowball and Eleven out of his mind. But that was easier said than done.

The Next Day

Hopper placed the birth certificate Dr. Owens had just given him in his pocket. His meeting with the doctor had gone better than even Hopper could have planned. He didn't know how Dr. Owens was going to help him and Eleven, but when the doctor had called that morning to say he wanted to meet, Hopper had been hopeful that it would be good news. And it was. Eleven was his daughter. Emotionally she had been his daughter for quite some time. But now, she was his daughter legally. No one could take her away from him. They still had to wait a little more time before things really calmed

down enough for her to step out of the shadows, but Hopper could wait. He would do anything to give her the life she deserved. Then there was the little matter of the school dance. Hopper knew Eleven desperately wanted to go. And Dr. Owens hadn't exactly said no. He had just said 'be careful.' It was up to Hopper whether or not he thought she should go. She had spent so much time cooped up in the small cabin that Hopper wanted her to start getting out to enjoy life. Step one would be the Hawkins Middle School Snowball.

Hopper got in his car outside the bar and sped off towards home. In no time at all, he parked the truck on the side of the road and headed off on foot towards the cabin. He was so excited to tell Eleven the good news that by the time he got to the front door of the cabin, he almost fumbled his secret knock. Hopper pulled himself together and managed to wipe the goofy smile off his face. He didn't want her to think there was something wrong with him. Hopper knocked and a moment later, the door opened.

"You're early," Eleven said as she opened the door.

"Yeah, well, I figured it's never too late to start working on your promises. Maybe this'll make up for all of those times I was late."

Hopper closed the door the cabin, locking it behind them. He took off his coat and hat and threw them on a nearby chair.

"You don't have to work late?"

"Nope. Took the rest of the day off."

"Why?" Eleven asked, confused. He had never done that before.

"Because I have something to show you."

Hopper reached into the breast pocket of his shirt. He pulled out a piece of paper. He handed it to Eleven. She took it, looking it over carefully.

"I don't understand," she said.

"It's your birth certificate."

"Birth certificate?"

"Yeah. When everyone a baby is born, they're given a birth certificate that shows who the baby's parents are and what the baby's name is. It's...official. Filed with the government. This is your new birth certificate."

Eleven ran her fingertip over the name of her mother. Then she looked at the father's name. She glanced up at him sharply.

"But you're not my father," she said.

"Legally, now I am."

Eleven stared at him, trying to make sense of it.

"My father?" She questioned.

"Yeah. Is that...ok?"

Eleven looked back down at the piece of paper and then up at Hopper again. Suddenly tears came to her eyes. She wasn't sure why. She wasn't sad. She wasn't hurt. But nevertheless, a tear rolled down her cheek.

"Yes," she answered.

Hopper opened his arms and Eleven stepped towards him. He enveloped her in a tight hug. She buried her head against his chest, letting herself feel loved and protected. As much as there were moments where she didn't like Hopper and disagreed with him, she also loved him. He made her feel safe. He made her feel like she had a home. Eleven guessed that's how children were supposed to feel about their parents. She had just never felt that way about her papa. But, then again, he was never a real father to her anyway.

"I'm glad you're happy, kid."

She stepped out of his embrace. "It says my name is Jane."

"Yeah, that's the name your mother gave you. But we don't have to call you Jane, unless you want to."

"No," she said, shaking her head. "My name is Eleven."

He nodded. "Ok. We just might have a harder time convincing teachers to call you that at school."

"School?"

"Yeah."

"I get to go to school?" She questioned, more tears unexpectedly threatening to fall.

"Not right away. Dr. Owens says we still have to wait for things to calm down a bit. But eventually."

"I'll get to be like a real kid," she said.

"Yeah."

"How long?" She asked with a smile. "How long is not right away?"

"A year."

Eleven's smile faded. "Three hundred sixty-five days," she whispered.

"It won't be that bad," Hopper assured her. "It doesn't mean you have to be locked up here alone for all that time. Mike can come visit. And we can start with little things."

"Little things?"

"Yeah, like going to the store one day or maybe even going to see a movie. We just have to be careful. And we're going to have to figure out an explanation for how and why I suddenly have a teenager living with me, but we'll get there. I promise you, it won't be like before."

She nodded. "Ok."

"And there's one more thing," Hopper added.

"What?"

"How would you like to go to the Snowball tomorrow?"

Eleven's eyes widened. "But you said one year."

"I think we can make an exception for one night."

"I can go to the Snowball?" Eleven asked, trying to keep the excitement from her voice.

"Yes. We'll still have to be careful. And I'm going to be outside the entire time, but you can go."

Eleven practically leaped into his arms, hugging him again.

"Thank you!" She shrieked, sounding like a very normal, very excited teenager.

"You're welcome. But there's something we...ah...we have to do before the Snowball."

"What?"

"We have to find you something to wear."

Eleven looked down at her overalls and her red shirt.

"I have clothes."

"Yeah, but you can't wear that," Hopper said. He thought about what was in her closet.

Hopper had done all of the clothes shopping for her. He had basically stuck to three main things. Jeans, sweaters, and plaid shirts. Eleven had nothing that she could wear to a dance. "Or anything else you own."

"Why?"

"Because when you go to a school dance, you...you...dress up. The girls usually wear dresses."

"I don't have a dress," she said, her excitement fading.

"Don't worry. We're going to get you one. Come on."

Eleven smiled. She couldn't wait.

Author's Note: I'm so sorry for the long wait for this chapter. Things in my real life have just been crazy recently and I haven't found much time for writing. I promise you, though, that this story will be completed (just maybe not as quickly as I would like). Thank you so much for sticking with me and reading!

8. Chapter 8

Chapter 8

Hopper stared at the seemingly endless maze of sequins, glitter, oversized sleeves and bright colors on the racks in front of him. He didn't know where to start. He was completely lost.

"Can I help you?" An older woman asked, approaching Hopper from the side. He turned and looked her over. He guessed she was in her early seventies, her white hair perfectly quaffed on the top of her head. The name tag pinned on her white blouse said 'Gladys.'

"Yes. I'm looking for a dress for my..." Hopper paused.

"For your...?" The saleswoman prompted.

"Daughter," Hopper finally answered. The word felt natural coming off his tongue, but he was also nervous to say it out loud. Then again, he had driven over an hour to get to the mall three towns away so that no one would recognize him. Getting a dress for his daughter was completely normal, wasn't it?

"Is she with you?" Gladys asked, glancing around as if a girl was about to pop into the aisle out of the racks of dresses at any minute.

"No. She's...sick. But she has this school dance coming up and I'm rather hopeless," he said with a flirtatious smile. Despite the fact that he could be a crotchety son of a bitch, Hopper was good at schmoozing.

"How old is she?"

"Thirteen."

"And what size does she wear?"

"Ah..." Hopper looked around. He pulled the first dress he could get his hands on off the rack. It was green and had sparkles all over the bust. "About this size."

Gladys looked at him hopelessly. But then she smiled like any good store clerk would do who was about to receive a pretty sizeable commission.

"Well, I'm sure we can find her something lovely," the saleswoman said. "Follow me."

Gladys headed straight into the racks filled with dresses. Hopper hesitated, but followed her in. He was beginning to think that dress shopping was as bad as going into the Upside Down. When a cobalt blue dress seemingly jumped off its hanger and fell at his feet, he was positive that he would rather face a demodog any day.

A few hours later, Hopper returned to the cabin in the woods, holding a dress in a black garment bag folded over his arm. In the other hand he held a bag with one inch high-heeled shoes and hairspray, two items the woman said a teenage girl shouldn't be without on the day of a formal dance. Hopper walked into the cabin. Eleven was sitting on the couch, watching TV.

"You're late," she said without looking up at him.

"I'm sorry. I was out getting you something."

With the nod of her head, she turned the TV off and sprang off the couch. In an instant, her anger at his lateness had turned to excitement. She looked at Hopper, staring at the bundle he was holding.

"What is it?"

"Open it and find out."

Hopper held the dress up by the hanger so that Eleven could unzip the garment bag. She did so slowly. A bright, neon pink satin fabric came into view. It was a color Eleven had never really seen before. It was an unnatural color. Eleven let the garment bag drop on the floor and she stared at the dress. It was long sleeves, with big puffs coming out at the shoulders. It was about knee length and had light pink ruffles on the bottom.

"And I got you these," Hopper continued, taking a pair of matching

neon pink heels out of the bag. "I hope they're your size." Eleven looked from the dress to Hopper. She could see by his face that he was proud of his accomplishment, but she couldn't understand why. The dress was hideous. Not to mention it looked about three sizes too big.

"It's...pretty?" She managed to say although it came out as more of a question than a statement. She had been learning from Mike that sometimes you said something to someone that wasn't a whole truth if it meant not hurting their feelings. Eleven didn't exactly understand when it was ok to lie to someone and when it wasn't, but she was working on it.

"Friends don't lie," Hopper reminded her, reading the expression on her face. "What do you really think of it?"

"I....I...." Eleven stuttered, wondering if it was one of those times she should tell him the opposite of what she really thought. "I don't like it."

"I knew you wouldn't," Hopper exclaimed, tossing the dress on the back of the couch. "The woman at the mall said this was the best selling dress this year and I didn't know what else to do. I'm sorry, kid."

"Why are you sorry?"

"I'm trying to do the right thing here," Hopper said and he meant it. Ever since he took Eleven in, he had been trying to do the right thing. But it seemed like he failed more than he succeeded. Hopper glanced at his watch. "The mall's going to be closed in like ten minutes and I won't have time tomorrow to get you another dress before the dance."

"It's ok," she told him. "Mike said I was pretty in Nancy's old pink dress. Maybe he'll think I'm pretty in this one, too."

"You shouldn't..." Hopper began, ready to give her a lesson on not measuring herself by what some boy thinks. But then a thought hit him. "You fit into one of Nancy's old dresses?"

"Yes," Eleven answered.

"Then I think I have an idea."

The next day, Hopper pulled his jeep into the parking lot of the middle school, parking right next to Nancy Wheeler's car, and turned the engine off. He glanced into the backseat before opening the driver's side door and stepping out. Hopper made his way into the gymnasium where a few of the teachers were mingling around, putting up decorations and getting ready for the Snowball Dance. Hopper saw Nancy and Jonathan Byers in the corner, setting up the backdrop for the photo area. They were laughing about something.

"How can we help you Sheriff Hopper?" Mr. Clark asked, approaching Hopper.

"Making sure everything's going alright," Hopper answered.

Mr. Clark raised an eyebrow. "At the middle school dance?"

"Just doing my job," Hopper stated in a way that said 'don't question the sheriff.'

"Right, of course."

Nancy caught Hopper's eye across the room. She immediately stopped laughing. Hopper nodded at her, but then looked away. He didn't want to draw attention to the fact that he wanted to see Nancy.

"Well, carry on," Hopper said to Mr. Clark. "You're doing a fine job."

"Thanks," Mr. Clark replied suspiciously.

Hopper walked back out the way he came. He went to his jeep and leaned against the driver's side door. Lighting a cigarette, he took a long drag. A few minutes later, Nancy came out of the gym and walked over to his car.

"Is it Mike?" She asked. "Is something wrong?"

"No."

Hopper shifted his eyes to the backseat. Nancy looked in the window. All she saw was a yellow blanket covering something on the

backseat. She had no idea why Hopper was there to see her.

"What's going on?" She asked.

"We need your help."

She lowered her voice. "Is El ok?"

"She wants to go to the dance," Hopper explained.

"What?"

"The Snowball. She wants to go to the Snowball tonight. Your kid brother asked her."

"Mike asked her to the dance?" Nancy asked, impressed with Mike.

"Do you two not talk or something?"

"He's my brother. Not my best friend." Nancy paused. "Wait, I thought it was too dangerous for Eleven to go out?"

"She deserves to be a normal kid for one night," Hopper explained.
"Which is why I need your help."

"With what?"

Hopper leaned in. He practically whispered in her ear. "I don't know anything about getting a teenage girl ready for a dance."

Nancy laughed. "You take down bad guys and fight demodogs, but you can't handle going to the mall and buying a dress?"

"I did buy a dress," he confessed. "She...didn't like it."

"Let me guess, the sales lady convinced you to buy the most expensive dress on the rack, but Eleven thinks it's hideous, doesn't she?"

Hopper nodded. "That about sums it up. Please, Nancy. I need your help. Eleven needs your help."

"I'll help," she said and Hopper breathed a sigh of relief. "You can

drop her off at my house."

"What about your parents?"

"They won't be home until five."

"And Mike? He doesn't know she can go yet."

She raised an eyebrow. "Keeping this a big secret, huh?"

"Don't want to break the kid's heart if it turns out that she can't go after all."

"He's going to AV club after school," Nancy explained. "Him and his little geeky friends are helping set up the sound system for the dance with Mr. Clark. Why don't I meet you and El at my house in half an hour?"

"She's...ah...she's already here," Hopper said, pointing to the backseat.

"What?" Nancy replied. She stared at the yellow blanket and realized it was moving slightly. She realized that Eleven was crouched down in the backseat, hidden under the blanket.

"You have her back there like a stowaway?" Nancy hissed.

"It's for her own protection. This could all still be dangerous for her. For all of you. There might still be people out there looking for her."

"Mike said you were working on that," Nancy said.

"So I guess you two do talk."

"Sometimes.

"Look, going to your house could be dangerous," Hopper began, giving his usual spiel. "If..."

"She'll be alright," Nancy assured him.

"I'll be close by. Call me if anything...happens."

"I will."

"And if she..."

"We'll be fine," Nancy cut him off.

Hopper nodded. "Ok. He opened the back door to his jeep. Hopper pulled off the yellow blanket that was covering the floor and most of the seat of the back seat. Eleven poked her head up and smiled at Nancy.

"You'll make me pretty for the dance?" Eleven asked.

"You're already pretty, kid," Hopper told her.

"Don't worry, we'll get you ready for the dance," Nancy assured her.

"Thank you," Hopper said, handing the yellow blanket to Nancy, expecting her to cover Eleven.

"Is that really necessary?" Nancy asked.

"I'm not taking any chances."

"You're letting her go to a school dance. She should be able to ride in a car without having to be hidden."

Hopper sighed, knowing Nancy was right. If he felt comfortable enough to let her go to a middle school dance, he should be letting her ride in a car. But Hopper knew the fear of someone finding out about her would never go away. Even though he held a birth certificate with his name as Eleven's father, Hopper knew that someone would always be out there looking for her. A girl as special as Eleven didn't just disappear without someone wanting to know where she was.

"Fine," he mumbled. Hopper opened the front passenger side door of Nancy's car and Eleven climbed in. "Be careful."

"We will," Nancy assured him, getting into the driver's side, and starting the engine.

"And let's make sure when you're all done that she still looks like a little girl and not a..."

"She's not a little girl," Nancy replied. "But don't worry. I'll make her look nice."

"Thanks."

"See ya, kid," Hopper said to Eleven.

Eleven waved at him. Hopper waited outside his car until Nancy and Eleven drove away. As Nancy drove towards her house, she glanced over at Eleven.

"So Hopper said you could go to the dance, huh?" Nancy asked.

"Yes."

"And Mike doesn't know?"

"No. Hopper said I shouldn't tell him. Just in case."

"Well, won't he be surprised," Nancy commented.

"Is that a good surprise?"

"Yes. It's going to be a very good surprise."

"Hopper bought me an ugly dress," Eleven told her.

Nancy laughed. "He told me. But at least he tried. My dad wouldn't be caught dead in the dress department."

"Why would he want to die in the dress department?" Eleven asked innocently.

"Never mind."

They drove the rest of the way in silence. Once Nancy parked in the driveway, she and Eleven rushed into the house so no one would see them. Nancy led Eleven upstairs to her room. Eleven sat on the bed while Nancy opened her closet.

"I have all of my old dresses in the back," Nancy explained. She pushed some clothes out of the way and found the garments she was looking for. "Come look."

Eleven stood up and walked over to the closet. She put her hand on the first dress. It was red. It had sparkles all over it and similar puffy sleeves to the dress Hopper had brought home. Eleven pushed that one aside and looked at the next one. It was white.

"So many," Eleven said.

"Yeah, I've been to a lot of dances."

The next one Eleven looked at was black.

"This one?" Eleven asked.

"I think that's a little too...fancy for middle school. I wore that to prom last year."

"Prom?"

"A high school dance."

"I thought that was called homecoming," Eleven said, remembering hers and Mike's conversation.

"That's another high school dance."

"Lots of dances," Eleven said.

"Yeah." Nancy pushed aside a few more dresses before taking one out of the closet. "What about this one?"

Eleven stepped back and looked at it. She smiled. "Yes."

Nancy returned her smile. "Why don't you go try it on?"

Eleven took the dress from her. She went down the hall to the bathroom and changed into the dress. She returned to Nancy's room.

"It's perfect," Nancy said. She adjusted the red belt around Eleven's waist and smoothed out some of the wrinkles on the front of the dress. "Do you have any shoes other than sneakers?"

Eleven looked down at her feet. "No. Hopper bought me shoes, but..."

"Let me guess, they were ugly and way too big?"

"How did you know?" Eleven asked. "Do you have powers, too?"

"No. I just know that men are clueless when it comes to teenage girls. What size do you wear?"

"I don't know."

"Let's see if these fit," Nancy said, pulling out a pair of black flats from her closet. She placed them on the floor in front of Eleven. Eleven kicked off her sneakers and slipped the shoes on.

"They fit," Eleven said happily.

"It's a very good thing we are the same size," Nancy said. "Now for some makeup. Have you ever worn makeup before?"

Eleven nodded. "Yes."

Nancy busied herself with getting her makeup kit out. She took out eyeshadow, blush, and lipstick.

"Oh right. The grunge look. There's nothing wrong with having a look, but that was all wrong for you."

"Before that," Eleven corrected. "Your makeup."

"My makeup? When did you wear my makeup?" Nancy questioned.

"Mike. To make me look like less of a weirdo."

"Mike came into my room and used my makeup?"

Eleven nodded. "Yes."

Nancy sighed. "I should be mad, but I'm not."

"Why would you be mad?"

"Because he's not supposed to be in my room without permission. But I know he was just trying to help you. More to the point, you're not a weirdo, El."

"That's what Lucas said."

"Is that why they gave you the pink dress last year?"

Eleven nodded. "Yes."

"Well, that was then and this is now. And you definitely will not look like a weirdo tonight."

Nancy began gently adding some blush to Eleven's cheeks. Then she continued with some pink eyeshadow. She knew that some girls at the dance would be wearing far too much makeup. Nancy did not want Eleven to be one of those girls. She probably didn't realize it yet, but Eleven was naturally beautiful. Nancy just wanted to accent her features rather than cover them up.

"You know, it's nice having a girl around to do this with," Nancy said.

"You miss Barb."

Nancy nodded. "Yeah, I do. Not that she was usually very interested in doing makeup, but I miss having someone like her to talk to. Having you around is like having a sister."

"You have a sister," Eleven said.

"Yeah and I love Holly a lot, but she's a lot younger than me. She was mom and dad's surprise baby."

"Good surprise or bad surprise?"

"Depends who you ask," Nancy said with a smile as she put the finishing touches on Eleven's makeup.

"I don't understand."

"Don't worry about it." Nancy grabbed a hand mirror from her vanity. "Here, take a look."

Eleven took the mirror and looked at herself. She liked how the makeup looked on her. It felt much more natural than the look Number Eight had given her. That was too much makeup for Eleven's liking.

"Thank you," Eleven said. She touched her hair, her natural brunette curls bouncing. "Not pretty."

"Your hair is great, El. And it'll grow. And we can do something with it if you want."

"Something?"

"Yeah. Hold on."

Nancy left the room. While she was gone, Eleven continued to stare at her reflection. Nancy returned a few minutes later with her arms full of hair products. She had headbands, hair elastics, hairspray, hair gel, a brush, and a few bobby pins and barrettes. Nancy dropped them all on the bed.

"What is all this?" Eleven asked, picking up a can of hairspray.

"You'll see."

Nancy grabbed the brush and ran it through Eleven's hair. She began styling the hair in different ways, sometimes using some of the accessories she had brought in. Eleven held the mirror, looking at what Nancy was doing. Eleven never knew that there were so many ways someone could wear their hair.

It took Nancy over thirty minutes to finally come up with a hairstyle she was happy with. When she was done, she put the small mirror Eleven was holding down and marched El over to the full length mirror on her closet door. Eleven looked at herself. From her dress to her makeup to her hair, she looked very different.

"Pretty?" Eleven asked.

"Yes. You look very pretty. Trust me, Mike will love it."

"He will?"

Nancy nodded. "Yes, but I didn't do this for him."

"I don't understand," Eleven replied, confused.

"From one girl to another...it's great to want to get dressed up and impress a guy. I mean, it can be fun to put on makeup and do your hair and put on a nice dress. But don't ever change yourself for a guy. Don't let Mike or any other boy ever tell you you're not good enough or make you feel like you're not pretty or worth it. Because you are. Ok?"

"Ok."

"And that is what we call sisterly advice. Sometimes I wish I had an older sister to tell me these things. Maybe then I wouldn't have made some of the mistakes I've made."

"What mistakes?" Eleven asked.

"That is a conversation for another time. Besides, I have to get you back to Hopper before he wonders what's happened to you. And the dance starts soon. You don't want to be late."

Eleven looked at herself one last time. She hoped Mike would be happy surprised to see her.

Author's Note: So this chapter ended up way longer than expected. I did not initially intend on having the 'Hopper goes to the mall' scene, but I thought that would be something he would actually try to do. Anyway, I hope you liked it and thanks for reading. Only one chapter left!

9. Chapter 9

Chapter 9

Mike watched as Max pulled Lucas to the dance floor and Dustin went off to try to impress some girls. Mike sat alone at the table they had chosen to sit at, staring straight ahead at nothing in particular. He sighed. He wished he hadn't agreed to go to the dance. It seemed pointless to be there without the one person he really wanted to be there with. Mike thought of Eleven and wondered what she was doing at that moment. Was she watching TV or having dinner with Hopper or was she sitting on her little bed in the cabin wishing she were at the dance with Mike? He hoped it was the latter. Not because he wanted her to be miserable like he was, but because it would make him feel good to know that she was missing him as much as he was missing her.

Outside of the middle school, Hopper stopped his car. Eleven was staring out the passenger side window at the school building.

"You ready?" Hopper asked.

"Yes," Eleven answered.

"Now remember, I'm going to be right outside."

"I know."

"If anything starts to feel weird or if people start asking too many questions..."

"I know," Eleven repeated.

Hopper stared at her, beginning to feel worried for a different reason. He always worried about Eleven's safety and whether or not she would be found out. But in that moment he began to worry about her as a teenage girl. Would she have fun with her friends? Would the dance be everything she dreamed it would be? Would Mike be a gentleman?

"You look good, kid," Hopper said.

Eleven looked over at him and smiled. "Pretty?"

"Yeah. Very pretty. Now have a good time."

Eleven opened the door and got out of the truck. She straightened her dress and began walking towards the school. As she got closer to the door, she turned back to look at Hopper. He waved to her. She smiled and continued on her way into the school building. As she walked inside, Eleven got a strange feeling in her stomach. She wasn't in pain and she wasn't hungry. Nervous, she realized. It was one of Hopper's words he taught her. Eleven was nervous although she wasn't sure why. She was excited to be spending the night with Mike. She just didn't want to disappoint him. After all, he thought she wasn't coming. What if he was angry that she showed up? What if he didn't want her to come after all? Eleven looked around, suddenly worried and wondering if she should just get back in Hopper's car. That was when she saw Mike.

Mike looked up from the floor and saw what almost looked like a mirage. Eleven was standing by the doors in a blue dress with a red belt around her waist. She looked different, but it was a good different. Mike immediately stood up and she locked eyes with him. He felt awkward in his sweater and jacket and bowtie. He suddenly had the urge to see if his hair needed fixing or if he had something stuck in his teeth. But he resisted those urges and just started walking towards Eleven. She approached him and they met in the middle of the dance floor.

"You look beautiful," Mike said as it was the first thing that came to his mind. Her hair was pulled back and she had a little bit of makeup on. Mike was taken with her. She blushed slightly at the compliment, turning her head away from him for a moment. Mike had always thought she was pretty. Even when he first met her with no hair, drenched out in the woods. But she looked absolutely stunning standing there in front of him in that dress.

"Do you want to dance?" Mike asked.

Eleven looked around nervously. "I...don't know how."

"I don't either. Do you want to figure it out?"

Eleven nodded. Mike took her hand and together they walked to the middle of the dance floor.

"Ok, like this" Mike said, taking Eleven's hands and placing them on his shoulders. "Yeah, like that."

Mike put his hands at her waist. Eleven instinctively got closer to him, putting her hands more comfortably around his neck. They smiled at each other as they moved to the music. Mike paid no attention to what was going on around him as he and Eleven danced. He cared only about her. As he looked into her eyes, Mike knew he wanted to kiss her again. He wanted her to know and feel just how much he had missed her. So Mike leaned forward, bringing his face close to hers. He pressed his lips against hers, tasting her lip balm. It lasted only seconds, but as Mike pulled away, he had never felt happier. He couldn't help but smile and Eleven grinned in return. She pressed her forehead against his, inching closer to him. They stayed like that, swaying to the music, until the song ended. When the music turned to something more up beat and kids starting breaking off into groups to dance, Mike finally picked his head up and looked at Eleven.

"What are they doing?" Eleven asked, looking at the other kids.

"Dancing," Mike answered. "Well, some of them are. Some of them are...I don't know what they're doing."

"That's...dancing?" Eleven questioned, paying close attention to a boy who was grabbing his leg behind him and jerking his body around.

"Sort of."

"I like dancing with you better."

Mike smiled. "Me too. Do you wanna...sit for a while?" Mike asked. He didn't really care what they did as long Eleven stayed with him.

"Ok."

Taking her hand again, Mike walked back over to the table where he had been sitting. He pulled a chair out and Eleven sat.

"Do you want something to drink? The punch is pretty good."

"Punch? Why would I want a punch?"

"No, not a punch. Just punch. It's a drink."

"Punch is something you drink?" Eleven asked.

"Yeah, it's a red drink," Mike explained. "Kind of sweet. I think you'll like it."

"Ok," Eleven said, standing up.

"No, I'll get it. You stay here."

"Why?"

"Because that's what guys do when they take a girl to a dance. They...get drinks."

"Oh," Eleven said sitting down again. "Why?"

"I don't know. That's just the way it is. I'll be right back."

Mike walked away, heading towards the snack table. Eleven observed the other kids in the room. Many of them were in large groups of either boys or girls. Very few groups were mixed. Eleven was surprised seeing as how a moment ago, boys were dancing with girls. Dances were strange things Eleven decided.

Across the room, Max saw Eleven sitting alone at the table the boys had previously claimed. Like Mike, Lucas had left to get two cups of punch for him and Max. Max studied Eleven, noticing that she was playing with something on her wrist. Eleven was looking around nervously, which surprised Max. She guessed Eleven wasn't nervous about too many things. Especially since she could always get out of a tough situation by using her powers. Max remembered their last interaction. It was when Eleven had killed the demodog outside of Will's house. Max had tried to introduce herself to Eleven, but Eleven had brushed her off. Max was determined to find out why. After all, it seemed like Eleven was here to stay and Max liked hanging out with the boys. She didn't want to have to start over making friends

just because she and Eleven couldn't get along.

Taking a deep breath, Max walked over to where Eleven sat. Eleven looked at her as she approached.

"Can I sit?" Max asked. Eleven didn't answer. Although it wasn't exactly an invitation, Max wasn't about the shy away. She slowly took a seat a few chairs away from Eleven.

"You look nice," Max added. Again, Eleven did not respond. She continued to look straight forward. Max tried to think of something else to say, but before she could open her mouth, Eleven spoke.

"You have pretty hair," Eleven said.

Max touched the ends of her red strands. "Thanks. My mom makes me keep it long, but I'd love to cut it like yours."

Eleven finally looked back at her. "My hair? You want hair like mine?"

"Yeah, it's cool. Don't you like it?"

Eleven shook her head. "Not pretty," she said.

"Are you kidding me? Your hair is great, El, and you are pretty. Trust me."

Eleven turned to look forward again. She was scanning the room for Mike, but he was with Lucas in line to get punch.

"I pushed you off your skateboard," Eleven stated.

"What?"

"Here. In the gym. Before."

"That...that was you?" Max asked, recalling the memory. She had been skateboarding around Mike in circles when suddenly it felt like something had pulled her off her board. She couldn't explain it. She had never fallen like that before.

"Yes," Eleven admitted.

"Why?"

Eleven shrugged. "You were talking to Mike."

"Oh," Max said. It was all making sense. "I get it."

Eleven whipped around, a surprised look on her face.

"You're not mad?"

"No. I mean, falling kind of hurt, but I've fallen harder before. It must have been difficult for you when you couldn't hang out with Mike. So I totally understand that you were mad when you saw me talking to him and you didn't know who I was or what I was doing there. I think that would make me angry, too."

"Mike said I did it because I was jealous," Eleven continued.

Max shrugged like it was no big deal. "Maybe, but trust me, you have nothing to be jealous about. I don't like Mike like that."

"You don't?"

Max crinkled her nose. "No. We're barely friends. Mike didn't even want me around back then."

"He didn't?"

"Not at all."

"But...you're friends now?" Eleven asked.

"I guess. Lucas and Dustin sorta brought me into the group even though Mike didn't want me there. So I guess we sorta became friends, but...but it's not like what you're thinking."

"So you don't like him?"

"Not as more than a friend. I mean Mike's nice and all, but he's not my type."

"Not your type?" Eleven questioned, unsure of what Max meant.

"He's not someone I would like as more than a friend. Not someone I'm attracted to. And trust me, he doesn't like me either. And he's definitely not attracted to me."

"How do you know?"

"Because he only has eyes for you," Max replied as if it was the most obvious thing in the world.

"I don't understand."

"I've never seen anyone look at another person the way Mike looked at you when you saw each other again at Will's house. It's like his heart had been broken and just seeing you put it back together again. When you're around, Mike acts like you're the only girl in the room. I mean, this gym is full of pretty girls all dressed up, but Mike was moping around until you showed up."

"He was?"

"Yeah. I don't think he even wanted to be here without you," Max continued. "He really likes you, El. A lot. Do you...do you like him?"

"We're friends," Eleven answered.

"Do you like him as more than friends? Do you like like him?" Max questioned.

Eleven caught Mike's eye from across the room. He smiled at her, a goofy grin on his face. Eleven couldn't help but smile back.

"Do you like like Lucas?" Eleven asked.

Max shrugged. "Maybe. I don't know. I mean, I like being around him and he's really cool and stuff. And I...I did kiss him, but I don't know. Sometimes I think I just want to keep being a kid, you know, and forget about all this boy and girl stuff."

"I don't know," Eleven said. "What is boy and girl stuff?"

"Just who likes who and who wants to be with who. It gets annoying after a while. Trust me, if you spend enough time with kids our age, you'll understand what I'm talking about."

"Oh," Eleven responded, feeling sad. She hated thinking about the things she missed out on because she had basically been locked up her whole life.

Mike and Lucas began walking towards them with drinks in their hands.

"Hey El?" Max said.

"Yes?"

"Do you think we could be friends? I mean, I know we got off to a rocky start and you don't really know me that well, but it would be nice to have a friend who's a girl and not just be stuck hanging out with the guys all the time, you know what I mean?"

Eleven smiled. "Yes, I think I know what you mean."

"So...friends?"

"Friends," Eleven said. She reached out her hand. Max took it and they shook.

"What's going on ladies?" Lucas asked, holding two cups. He handed one to Max and then sat down in a chair next to her.

"We're friends," Eleven stated. "She doesn't like like you Mike. And she's not sure if she like likes you Lucas."

Mike laughed, handing a cup of punch to Eleven. Max's cheeks turned red with embarrassment.

"I think the first thing we're going to have to do as friends is for me to teach you what girl talk is," Max said, trying to hide her embarrassment.

"Girl talk?" Eleven questioned.

"I'll tell you about it later," Max said.

"Where are Dustin and Will?" Lucas asked, ready to change the subject.

"After one of the popular girls saw Dustin dancing with Nancy, she asked him to dance," Max said, pointing to where Dustin was dancing opposite a girl from their class. He had a huge smile plastered on his face as they moved to the fast-paced song.

"And Will's talking to Jonathan," Mike answered.

"What are they doing?" Eleven asked, glancing over at where Jonathan was taking pictures of a boy and girl together. Will was standing beside him, talking to his older brother.

"Taking a picture," Mike explained.

"Why?" Eleven asked.

"It's just...what you do," Lucas stated.

"So that you can look back at it and twenty years and wonder what you were thinking," Max added.

Eleven looked perplexed. "Does it hurt?"

"To have your picture taken?" Mike said. "No. Not at all. Do you wanna...take a picture with me?"

"Yes," Eleven responded.

"Ok. Come on."

Mike and Eleven headed through the crowd of kids and over to where Jonathan was taking photographs in front of the background he and Nancy had set up earlier.

"Hey El," Will said when they approached, waiting behind a few kids who were in line for photos.

"Hi."

"I thought Mike said you weren't coming."

She shrugged. "Hopper changed his mind and said I could come."

"Yeah, what made him change his mind?" Mike asked.

"I'm his daughter now," Eleven answered as if that were an everyday statement.

"Wait...what?" Mike responded.

"He has a birth certificate with my name and his name on it," Eleven explained.

"Well, that's great!" Will exclaimed.

"Great?" Mike asked, not sure how to feel about the whole thing. He was still hoping somehow that Eleven could live with him. In the back of his mind, though, he knew that would never work.

"That means Eleven is that much closer to being a normal kid," Will continued.

"I guess. Are you...happy about this?" Mike asked her.

"Yes," she answered.

Mike took a moment. "Well, then that makes me happy, too. Eleven smiled in response. He took her hand and squeezed it.

"You're turn," Jonathan said. He and Will shared a knowing glance.

With their hands entwined, Mike led Eleven up to stand in front of the backdrop.

"I don't know what to do," she admitted.

"You've never had your picture taken before?" Mike asked.

She shook her head.

"It's easy," Jonathan said. "You just stand there and smile and I take a picture. In a few weeks, you get a copy of the picture to take home."

So, just stand on the tape on the floor."

Eleven looked down at her feet and stepped to where she needed be.

"Like this?" She asked.

"Yeah. Now Mike, stand behind El and put your hands on her hips."

Mike slowly brought his hands to her waist. Suddenly his palms felt sweaty. Even though they had danced close together and had already shared two kisses, Mike felt awkward having someone watch them be so close.

"Ok, now look at the camera and say cheese," Jonathan commanded.

"Cheese?" Eleven questioned. "But I'm not hungry."

"It's just an expression," Jonathan replied.

"Just smile," Mike whispered into her ear.

They both smiled and Jonathan took the picture.

"Alright, all done," Jonathan said.

Just as he said it, another slow song started.

"Can we dance again?" Eleven asked. "I liked dancing."

Mike nodded. As they made it to an empty space on the dance floor, Eleven didn't hesitate to wrap her arms around his neck while Mike snaked his arms around her waist.

"I'm really glad you came, El," Mike said quietly.

"Me too."

This time when her eyes met his, she closed the gap between them and kissed him lightly. With her cheeks flushed, Eleven leaned against his shoulder as they swayed to the music.

Author's Note: Well, there it is! I finally made it through the dance! A big thank you to everyone who has been reading and commenting

and following me on this little journey. I already have some more ideas for Stranger Things stories (centered around Mike and Eleven of course) so stay tuned for more!